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A SPORTSMAN'S SKETCHES

BY

IVAN TURGENEV

Translated from the Russian

By CONSTANCE GARNETT

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
XV. TATYANA BORISSOVNA AND HER NEPHEW,	1
XVI. DEATH,	20
XVII. THE SINGERS,	39
XVIII. PIOTR PETROVITCH KARATAEV,	68
XIX. THE TRYST,	92
XX. THE HAMLET OF THE SHTCHIGRI DISTRICT,	106
XXI. TCHERTOP-HANOV AND NEDOPYUSKIN,	146
XXII. THE END OF TCHERTOP-HANOV,	175
XXIII. A LIVING RELIC,	229
XXIV. THE RATTLING OF WHEELS,	251
XXV. EPILOGUE: THE FOREST AND THE STEPPE,	274

XV

TATYANA BORISSOVNA AND HER NEPHEW

GIVE me your hand, gentle reader, and come along with me. It is glorious weather; there is a tender blue in the May sky; the smooth young leaves of the willows glisten as though they had been polished; the wide even road is all covered with that delicate grass with the little reddish stalk that the sheep are so fond of nibbling; to right and to left, over the long sloping hillsides, the green rye is softly waving; the shadows of small clouds glide in thin long streaks over it. In the distance is the dark mass of forests, the glitter of ponds, yellow patches of village; larks in hundreds are soaring, singing, falling headlong with outstretched necks, hopping about the clods; the crows on the highroad stand still, look at you, peck at the earth, let you drive close up, and with two hops lazily move aside. On a hill beyond a ravine a peasant is ploughing; a piebald colt, with a cropped tail and ruffled mane, is running on unsteady legs after its mother; its shrill whinnying reaches us. We drive on into the birch wood,

and drink in the strong, sweet, fresh fragrance. Here we are at the boundaries. The coachman gets down ; the horses snort ; the trace-horses look round ; the centre horse in the shafts switches his tail, and turns his head up towards the wooden yoke above it . . . the great gate opens creaking; the coachman seats himself. . . . Drive on ! the village is before us. Passing five homesteads, and turning off to the right, we drop down into a hollow and drive along a dyke, the farther side of a small pond ; behind the round tops of the lilacs and apple-trees a wooden roof, once red, with two chimneys, comes into sight ; the coachman keeps along the hedge to the left, and to the spasmodic and drowsy baying of three pug dogs he drives through the wide open gates, whisks smartly round the broad courtyard past the stable and the barn, gallantly salutes the old housekeeper, who is stepping sideways over the high lintel in the open doorway of the storehouse, and pulls up at last before the steps of a dark house with light windows. . . . We are at Tatyana Borissovna's. And here she is herself opening the window and nodding at us. . . . 'Good day, ma'am !'

Tatyana Borissovna is a woman of fifty, with large, prominent grey eyes, a rather broad nose, rosy cheeks and a double chin. Her face is brimming over with friendliness and kindness She was once married, but was soon left a widow. Tatyana Borissovna is a very remarkable woman. She lives on her little property, never leaving it,

mixes very little with her neighbours, sees and likes none but young people. She was the daughter of very poor landowners, and received no education; in other words, she does not know French; she has never been in Moscow—and in spite of all these defects, she is so good and simple in her manners, so broad in her sympathies and ideas, so little infected with the ordinary prejudices of country ladies of small means, that one positively cannot help marvelling at her. . . . Indeed, a woman who lives all the year round in the country and does not talk scandal, nor whine, nor curtsey, is never flurried, nor depressed, nor in a flutter of curiosity, is a real marvel! She usually wears a grey taffetas gown and a white cap with lilac streamers; she is fond of good cheer, but not to excess; all the preserving, pickling, and salting she leaves to her housekeeper. 'What does she do all day long?' you will ask. . . . 'Does she read?' No, she doesn't read, and, to tell the truth, books are not written for her. . . . If there are no visitors with her, Tatyana Borissovna sits by herself at the window knitting a stocking in winter; in summer time she is in the garden, planting and watering her flowers, playing for hours together with her cats, or feeding her doves. . . . She does not take much part in the management of her estate. But if a visitor pays her a call—some young neighbour whom she likes—Tatyana Borissovna is all life directly; she makes him sit down, pours him out some tea, listens to his chat,

laughs, sometimes pats his cheek, but says little herself; in trouble or sorrow she comforts and gives good advice. How many people have confided their family secrets and the griefs of their hearts to her, and have wept over her hands! At times she sits opposite her visitor, leaning lightly on her elbow, and looks with such sympathy into his face, smiles so affectionately, that he cannot help feeling: 'What a dear, good woman you are, Tatyana Borissovna! Let me tell you what is in my heart.' One feels happy and warm in her small, snug rooms; in her house it is always, so to speak, fine weather. Tatyana Borissovna is a wonderful woman, but no one wonders at her; her sound good sense, her breadth and firmness, her warm sympathy in the joys and sorrows of others—in a word, all her qualities are so innate in her; they are no trouble, no effort to her. . . . One cannot fancy her otherwise, and so one feels no need to thank her. She is particularly fond of watching the pranks and follies of young people; she folds her hands over her bosom, throws back her head, puckers up her eyes, and sits smiling at them, then all of a sudden she heaves a sigh, and says, 'Ah, my children, my children!' . . . Sometimes one longs to go up to her, take hold of her hands and say: 'Let me tell you, Tatyana Borissovna, you don't know your own value; for all your simplicity and lack of learning, you're an extraordinary creature!' Her very name has a sweet familiar ring; one is glad to utter it; it calls up a

kindly smile at once. How often, for instance, have I chanced to ask a peasant: 'Tell me, my friend, how am I to get to Gratchevka?' let us say. 'Well, sir, you go on first to Vyazovoe, and from there to Tatyana Borissovna's, and from Tatyana Borissovna's any one will show you the way.' And at the name of Tatyana Borissovna the peasant wags his head in quite a special way. Her household is small, in accordance with her means. The house, the laundry, the stores and the kitchen, are in the charge of the housekeeper, Agafya, once her nurse, a good-natured, tearful, toothless creature; she has under her two stalwart girls with stout crimson cheeks like Antonovsky apples. The duties of valet, steward, and waiter are filled by Policarp, an extraordinary old man of seventy, a queer fellow, full of erudition, once a violinist and worshipper of Viotti, with a personal hostility to Napoleon, or, as he calls him, Bonaparty, and a passion for nightingales. He always keeps five or six of the latter in his room; in early spring he will sit for whole days together by the cage, waiting for the first trill, and when he hears it, he covers his face with his hands, and moans, 'Oh, piteous, piteous!' and sheds tears in floods. Policarp has, to help him, his grandson Vasya, a curly-headed, sharp-eyed boy of twelve; Policarp adores him, and grumbles at him from morning till night. He undertakes his education too. 'Vasya,' he says, 'say Bonaparty was a scoundrel.' 'And what'll you give me, granddad?' 'What 'll

I give you? . . . I 'll give you nothing. . . . Why, what are you? Aren't you a Russian?' 'I 'm a Mtchanin, granddad; I was born in Mtchensk.' 'Oh, silly dunce! but where is Mtchensk?' 'How can I tell?' 'Mtchensk 's in Russia, silly!' 'Well, what then, if it is in Russia?' 'What then? Why, his Highness the late Prince Mihalo Ilarionovitch Golenishtchev-Kutuzov-Smolensky, with God's aid, graciously drove Bonaparty out of the Russian territories. It 's on that event the song was composed: "Bonaparty 's in no mood to dance, He 's lost the garters he brought from France." . . . Do you understand? he liberated your fatherland.' 'And what 's that to do with me?' 'Ah! you silly boy! Why, if his Highness Prince Mihalo Ilarionovitch hadn't driven out Bonaparty, some mounseer would have been beating you about the head with a stick this minute. He 'd come up to you like this, and say: "Koman voo porty voo?" and then a box on the ear!' 'But I 'd give him one in the belly with my fist.' 'But he 'd go on: "Bonzhur, bonzhur, veny ici," and then a cuff on the head.' 'And I 'd give him one in his legs, his bandy legs.' 'You 're quite right, their legs are bandy. . . . Well, but suppose he tied your hands?' 'I wouldn't let him; I 'd call Mihay the coachman to help me.' 'But, Vasya, suppose you weren't a match for the Frenchy even with Mihay?' 'Not a match for him! See how strong Mihay is!' 'Well, and what would you do with him?' 'We 'd get him on his

back, we would.' 'And he'd shout, "Pardon, pardon, seevooplay!"' 'We'd tell him, "None of your seevooplays, you old Frenchy!"' 'Bravo, Vasya! . . . Well, now then, shout, "Bonaparty's a scoundrel!"' 'But you must give me some sugar!' 'You scamp!'

Of the neighbouring ladies Tatyana Borissovna sees very little; they do not care about going to see her, and she does not know how to amuse them; the sound of their chatter sends her to sleep; she starts, tries to keep her eyes open, and drops off again. Tatyana Borissovna is not fond of women as a rule. One of her friends, a good, harmless young man, had a sister, an old maid of thirty-eight and a half, a good-natured creature, but exaggerated, affected, and enthusiastic. Her brother had often talked to her of their neighbour. One fine morning our old maid has her horse saddled, and, without a word to any one, sallies off to Tatyana Borissovna's. In her long habit, a hat on her head, a green veil and floating curls, she went into the hall, and passing by the panic-stricken Vasya, who took her for a wood-witch, ran into the drawing-room. Tatyana Borissovna, scared, tried to rise, but her legs sank under her. 'Tatyana Borissovna,' began the visitor in a supplicating voice, 'forgive my temerity; I am the sister of your friend, Alexy Nikolaevitch K——, and I have heard so much about you from him that I resolved to make your acquaintance.' 'Greatly honoured,' muttered the bewildered lady.

The sister flung off her hat, shook her curls, seated herself near Tatyana Borissovna; took her by the hand. . . . 'So this is she,' she began in a pensive voice fraught with feeling: 'this is that sweet, clear, noble, holy being! This is she! that woman at once so simple and so deep! How glad I am! how glad I am! How we shall love each other! I can breathe easily at last. . . . I always fancied her just so,' she added in a whisper, her eyes riveted on the eyes of Tatyana Borissovna. 'You won't be angry with me, will you, my dear kind friend?' 'Really, I'm delighted! . . . Won't you have some tea?' The lady smiled patronisingly: '*Wie wahr, wie unreflectirt*,' she murmured, as it were to herself. 'Let me embrace you, my dear one!'

The old maid stayed three hours at Tatyana Borissovna's, never ceasing talking an instant. She tried to explain to her new acquaintance all her own significance. Directly after the unexpected visitor had departed, the poor lady took a bath, drank some lime-flower water, and took to her bed. But the next day the old maid came back, stayed four hours, and left, promising to come to see Tatyana Borissovna every day. Her idea, please to observe, was to develop, to complete the education of so rich a nature, to use her own expression, and she would probably have really been the death of her, if she had not, in the first place, been utterly disillusioned as regards her brother's friend within a fortnight, and secondly,

fallen in love with a young student on a visit in the neighbourhood, with whom she at once rushed into a fervid and active correspondence; in her missives she consecrated him, as the manner of such is, to a noble, holy life, offered herself wholly a sacrifice, asked only for the name of sister, launched into endless descriptions of nature, made allusions to Goethe, Schiller, Bettina and German philosophy, and drove the luckless young man at last to the blackest desperation. But youth asserted itself: one fine morning he woke up with such a furious hatred for 'his sister and best of friends' that he almost killed his valet in his passion, and was snappish for a long while after at the slightest allusion to elevated and disinterested passion. But from that time forth Tatyana Borissovna began to avoid all intimacy with ladies of the neighbourhood more than ever.

Alas! nothing is lasting on this earth. All I have related as to the way of life of my kind-hearted neighbour is a thing of the past; the peace that used to reign in her house has been destroyed for ever. For more than a year now there has been living with her a nephew, an artist from Petersburg. This is how it came about.

Eight years ago, there was living with Tatyana Borissovna a boy of twelve, an orphan, the son of her brother, Andryusha. Andryusha had large, clear, humid eyes, a tiny little month, a regular nose, and a fine lofty brow. He spoke in a low,

sweet voice, was attentive and coaxing with visitors, kissed his auntie's hand with an orphan's sensibility; and one hardly had time to show oneself before he had put a chair for one. He had no mischievous tricks; he was never noisy; he would sit by himself in a corner with a book, and with such sedateness and propriety, never even leaning back in his chair. When a visitor came in, Andryusha would get up, with a decorous smile and a flush; when the visitor went away he would sit down again, pull out of his pocket a brush and a looking-glass, and brush his hair. From his earliest years he had shown a taste for drawing. Whenever he got hold of a piece of paper, he would ask Agafya the housekeeper for a pair of scissors at once, carefully cut a square piece out of the paper, trace a border round it and set to work; he would draw an eye with an immense pupil, or a Grecian nose, or a house with a chimney and smoke coming out of it in the shape of a corkscrew, a dog, *en face*, looking rather like a bench, or a tree with two pigeons on it, and would sign it: 'Drawn by Andrei Byelovzorov, such a day in such a year, in the village of Maliya-Briki.' He used to toil with special industry for a fortnight before Tatyana Borissovna's birthday; he was the first to present his congratulations and offer her a roll of paper tied up with a pink ribbon. Tatyana Borissovna would kiss her nephew and undo the knot; the roll was unfolded and presented to the inquisitive

gaze of the spectator, a round, boldly sketched temple in sepia, with columns and an altar in the centre; on the altar lay a burning heart and a wreath, while above, on a curling scroll, was inscribed in legible characters: 'To my aunt and benefactress, Tatyana Borissovna Bogdanov, from her dutiful and loving nephew, as a token of his deepest affection.' Tatyana Borissovna would kiss him again and give him a silver rouble. She did not, though, feel any very warm affection for him; Andryusha's fawning ways were not quite to her taste. Meanwhile, Andryusha was growing up; Tatyana Borissovna began to be anxious about his future. An unexpected incident solved the difficulty to her.

One day eight years ago she received a visit from a certain Mr. Benevolensky, Piotr Mihalitch, a college councillor with a decoration. Mr. Benevolensky had at one time held an official post in the nearest district town, and had been assiduous in his visits to Tatyana Borissovna; then he had moved to Petersburg, got into the ministry, and attained a rather important position, and on one of the numerous journeys he took in the discharge of his official duties, he remembered his old friend, and came back to see her, with the intention of taking a rest for two days from his official labours 'in the bosom of the peace of nature.' Tatyana Borissovna greeted him with her usual cordiality, and Mr. Benevolensky. . . . But before we proceed with the rest of the story,

gentle reader, let us introduce you to this new personage.

Mr. Benevolensky was a stoutish man, of middle height and mild appearance, with little short legs and little fat hands; he wore a roomy and excessively spruce frock-coat, a high broad cravat, snow-white linen, a gold chain on his silk waistcoat, a gem-ring on his forefinger, and a white wig on his head; he spoke softly and persuasively, trod noiselessly, and had an amiable smile, an amiable look in his eyes, and an amiable way of settling his chin in his cravat; he was, in fact, an amiable person altogether. God had given him a heart, too, of the softest; he was easily moved to tears and to transports; moreover, he was all aglow with disinterested passion for art: disinterested it certainly was, for Mr. Benevolensky, if the truth must be told, knew absolutely nothing about art. One is set wondering, indeed, whence, by virtue of what mysterious uncomprehended forces, this passion had come upon him. He was, to all appearance, a practical, even prosaic person . . . however, we have a good many people of the same sort among us in Russia.

Their devotion to art and artists produces in these people an inexpressible mawkishness; it is distressing to have to do with them and to talk to them; they are perfect logs smeared with honey. They never, for instance, call Raphael, Raphael, or Correggio, Correggio; 'the divine Sanzio, the incomparable di Allegri,' they murmur, and always

with the broadest vowels. Every pretentious, conceited, home-bred mediocrity they hail as a genius: 'the blue sky of Italy,' 'the lemons of the South,' 'the balmy breezes of the banks of the Brenta,' are for ever on their lips. 'Ah, Vasya, Vasya,' or 'Oh, Sasha, Sasha,' they say to one another with deep feeling, 'we must away to the South . . . we are Greeks in soul—ancient Greeks.' One may observe them at exhibitions before the works of some Russian painters (these gentlemen, it should be noted, are, for the most part, passionate patriots). First they step back a couple of paces, and throw back their heads; then they go up to the picture again; their eyes are suffused with an oily moisture. . . . 'There you have it, my God!' they say at last, in voices broken with emotion; 'there's soul, soul! Ah! what feeling, what feeling! Ah, what soul he has put into it! what a mass of soul! . . . And how he has thought it out! thought it out like a master!' And, oh! the pictures in their own drawing-rooms! Oh, the artists that come to them in the evenings, drink tea, and listen to their conversation! And the views in perspective they make them of their own rooms, with a broom in the foreground, a little heap of dust on the polished floor, a yellow samovar on a table near the window, and the master of the house himself in skull-cap and dressing-gown, with a brilliant streak of sunlight falling on his cheek! Oh, the long-haired nurslings of the Muse, wearing spasmodic and contemptuous

smiles, that cluster about them! Oh, the young ladies, with faces of greenish pallor, who squeal over their pianos! For that is the established rule with us in Russia; a man cannot be devoted to one art alone—he must have them all. And so it is not to be wondered at that these gentlemen extend their powerful patronage to Russian literature also, especially to dramatic literature. . . . The *Jacob Sannazars* are written for them; the struggle of unappreciated talent against the whole world, depicted a thousand times over, still moves them profoundly. . . .

The day after Mr. Benevolensky's arrival Tatyana Borissovna told her nephew at tea-time to show their guest his drawings. 'Why, does he draw?' said Mr. Benevolensky, with some surprise, and he turned with interest to Andryusha. 'Yes, he draws,' said Tatyana Borissovna; 'he 's so fond of it! and he does it all alone, without a master.' 'Ah! show me, show me,' cried Mr. Benevolensky. Andryusha, blushing and smiling, brought the visitor his sketch-book. Mr. Benevolensky began turning it over with the air of a connoisseur. 'Good, young man,' he pronounced at last; 'good, very good.' And he patted Andryusha on the head. Andryusha intercepted his hand and kissed it. 'Fancy, now, a talent like that! . . . I congratulate you, Tatyana Borissovna.' 'But what am I to do, Piotr Mihalitch? I can't get him a teacher here. To have one from the town is a great expense; our neighbours, the Artamonovs, have a

drawing-master, and they say an excellent one, but his mistress forbids his giving lessons to outsiders.' 'Hm,' pronounced Mr. Benevolensky; he pondered and looked askance at Andryusha. 'Well, we will talk it over,' he added suddenly, rubbing his hands. The same day he begged Tatyana Borissovna's permission for an interview with her alone. They shut themselves up together. In half-an-hour they called Andryusha — Andryusha went in. Mr. Benevolensky was standing at the window with a slight flush on his face and a beaming expression. Tatyana Borissovna was sitting in a corner wiping her eyes. 'Come, Andryusha,' she said at last, 'you must thank Piotr Mihalitch; he will take you under his protection; he will take you to Petersburg.' Andryusha almost fainted on the spot. 'Tell me candidly,' began Mr. Benevolensky, in a voice filled with dignity and patronising indulgence; 'do you want to be an artist, young man? Do you feel yourself consecrated to the holy service of Art?' 'I want to be an artist, Piotr Mihalitch,' Andryusha declared in a trembling voice. 'I am delighted, if so it be. It will, of course,' continued Mr. Benevolensky, 'be hard for you to part from your revered aunt; you must feel the liveliest gratitude to her.' 'I adore my auntie,' Andryusha interrupted, blinking. 'Of course, of course, that's readily understood, and does you great credit; but, on the other hand, consider the pleasure that in the future . . . your success. . . .' 'Kiss me, Andryusha,' muttered

the kind-hearted lady. Andryusha flung himself on her neck. 'There, now, thank your benefactor.' Andryusha embraced Mr. Benevolensky's stomach, and stretching on tiptoe, reached his hand and imprinted a kiss, which his benefactor, though with some show of reluctance, accepted. . . . He had, to be sure, to pacify the child, and, after all, might reflect that he deserved it. Two days later, Mr. Benevolensky departed, taking with him his new *protégé*.

During the first three years of Andryusha's absence he wrote pretty often, sometimes enclosing drawings in his letters. From time to time Mr. Benevolensky added a few words, for the most part of approbation; then the letters began to be less and less frequent, and at last ceased altogether. A whole year passed without a word from her nephew, and Tatyana Borissovna was beginning to be uneasy when suddenly she got the following note:—

'DEAREST AUNTIE, — Piotr Mihalitch, my patron, died three days ago. A severe paralytic stroke has deprived me of my sole support. To be sure, I am now twenty. I have made considerable progress during the last seven years; I have the greatest confidence in my talent, and can make my living by means of it; I do not despair; but all the same send me, if you can, as soon as convenient, 250 roubles. I kiss your hand and remain . . ' etc.

Tatyana Borissovna sent her nephew 250 roubles. Two months later he asked for more;

she got together every penny she had and sent it him. Not six weeks after the second donation he was asking a third time for help, ostensibly to buy colours for a portrait bespoken by Princess Tertereshenev. Tatyana Borissovna refused. 'Under these circumstances,' he wrote to her, 'I propose coming to you to regain my health in the country.' And in the May of the same year Andryusha did, in fact, return to Maliya-Briki.

Tatyana Borissovna did not recognise him for the first minute. From his letter she had expected to see a wasted invalid, and she beheld a stout, broad-shouldered fellow, with a big red face and greasy, curly hair. The pale, slender little Andryusha had turned into the stalwart Andrei Ivanovitch Byelovzorov. And it was not only his exterior that was transformed. The modest spruceness, the sedateness and tidiness of his earlier years, was replaced by a careless swagger and slovenliness quite insufferable; he rolled from side to side as he walked, lolled in easy-chairs, put his elbows on the table, stretched and yawned, and behaved rudely to his aunt and the servants. 'I'm an artist,' he would say; 'a free Cossack! That's our sort!' Sometimes he did not touch a brush for whole days together; then the inspiration, as he called it, would come upon him; then he would swagger about as if he were drunk, clumsy, awkward, and noisy; his cheeks were flushed with a coarse colour, his eyes dull; he

would launch into discourses upon his talent, his success, his development, the advance he was making. . . . It turned out in actual fact that he had barely talent enough to produce passable portraits. He was a perfect ignoramus, had read nothing; why should an artist read, indeed? Nature, freedom, poetry were his fitting elements; he need do nothing but shake his curls, talk, and suck away at his eternal cigarette! Russian audacity is a fine thing, but it doesn't suit every one; and Polezhaevs at second-hand, without the genius, are insufferable beings. Andrei Ivanovitch went on living at his aunt's; he did not seem to find the bread of charity bitter, notwithstanding the proverb. Visitors to the house found him a mortal nuisance. He would sit at the piano (a piano, too, had been installed at Tatyana Borissovna's) and begin strumming 'The Swift Sledge' with one finger; he would strike some chords, tap on the keys, and for hours together he would howl Varlamov's songs, 'The Solitary Pine,' or 'No, doctor, no, don't come to me,' in the most distressing manner, and his eyes seemed to disappear altogether, his cheeks were so puffed out and tense as drums. . . . Then he would suddenly strike up: 'Be still, distracting passion's tempest!' . . . Tatyana Borissovna positively shuddered.

'It's a strange thing,' she observed to me one day, 'the songs they compose nowadays; there's something desperate about them; in my day they were very different. We had mournful songs, too,

but it was always a pleasure to hear them. . . . For instance:—

"'Come, come to me in the meadow,
Where I am awaiting thee;
Come, come to me in the meadow,
Where I'm shedding tears for thee . . .
Alas! thou'rt coming to the meadow,
But too late, dear love, for me!"'

Tatyana Borissovna smiled slyly.

'I agon-ise, I agon-ise!' yelled her nephew in the next room.

'Be quiet, Andryusha!'

'My soul's consumed apart from thee!' the indefatigable singer continued.

Tatyana Borissovna shook her head.

'Ah, these artists! these artists!' . . .

A year has gone by since then. Byelovzorov is still living at his aunt's, and still talking of going back to Petersburg. He has grown as broad as he is long in the country. His aunt—who could have imagined such a thing?—idolises him, and the young girls of the neighbourhood are falling in love with him. . . .

Many of her old friends have given up going to Tatyana Borissovna's.

XVI

DEATH

I HAVE a neighbour, a young landowner and a young sportsman. One fine July morning I rode over to him with a proposition that we should go out grouse-shooting together. He agreed. 'Only let's go,' he said, 'to my underwoods at Zusha; I can seize the opportunity to have a look at Tchapligino; you know my oakwood; they're felling timber there.' 'By all means.' He ordered his horse to be saddled, put on a green coat with bronze buttons, stamped with a boar's head, a game-bag embroidered in crewels, and a silver flask, slung a new-fangled French gun over his shoulder, turned himself about with some satisfaction before the looking-glass, and called his dog, Hope, a gift from his cousin, an old maid with an excellent heart, but no hair on her head. We started. My neighbour took with him the village constable, Arhip, a stout, squat peasant with a square face and jaws of antediluvian proportions, and an overseer he had recently hired from the Baltic provinces, a youth of nineteen, thin, flaxen-haired, and short-sighted, with sloping shoulders and a long neck,

Herr Gottlieb von der Kock. My neighbour had himself only recently come into the property. It had come to him by inheritance from an aunt, the widow of a councillor of state, Madame Kardon-Kataev, an excessively stout woman, who did nothing but lie in her bed, sighing and groaning. We reached the underwoods. 'You wait for me here at the clearing,' said Ardalion Mihalitch (my neighbour) addressing his companions. The German bowed, got off his horse, pulled a book out of his pocket—a novel of Johanna Schopenhauer's, I fancy—and sat down under a bush; Arhip remained in the sun without stirring a muscle for an hour. We beat about among the bushes, but did not come on a single covey. Ardalion Mihalitch announced his intention of going on to the wood. I myself had no faith, somehow, in our luck that day; I, too, sauntered after him. We got back to the clearing. The German noted the page, got up, put the book in his pocket, and with some difficulty mounted his bob-tailed, broken-winded mare, who neighed and kicked at the slightest touch; Arhip shook himself, gave a tug at both reins at once, swung his legs, and at last succeeded in starting his torpid and dejected nag. We set off.

I had been familiar with Ardalion Mihalitch's wood from my childhood. I had often strolled in Tchapligino with my French tutor, Monsieur Désiré Fleury, the kindest of men (who had, however, almost ruined my constitution for life by dosing me with Leroux's mixture every evening).

The whole wood consisted of some two or three hundred immense oaks and ash-trees. Their stately, powerful trunks were magnificently black against the transparent golden green of the nut bushes and mountain-ashes; higher up, their wide knotted branches stood out in graceful lines against the clear blue sky, unfolding into a tent overhead; hawks, honey-buzzards and kestrels flew whizzing under the motionless tree-tops; variegated wood-peckers tapped loudly on the stout bark; the blackbird's bell-like trill was heard suddenly in the thick foliage, following on the ever-changing note of the gold-hammer; in the bushes below was the chirp and twitter of hedge-warblers, siskins, and peewits; finches ran swiftly along the paths; a hare would steal along the edge of the wood, halting cautiously as he ran; a squirrel would hop sporting from tree to tree, then suddenly sit still, with its tail over its head. In the grass among the high ant-hills under the delicate shade of the lovely, feathery, deep-indented bracken, were violets and lilies of the valley, and funguses, russet, yellow, brown, red and crimson; in the patches of grass among the spreading bushes red strawberries were to be found. . . . And oh, the shade in the wood! In the most stifling heat, at mid-day, it was like night in the wood: such peace, such fragrance, such freshness. . . . I had spent happy times in Tchapligino, and so, I must own, it was with melancholy feelings I entered the wood I knew so well. The

ruinous, snowless winter of 1840 had not spared my old friends, the oaks and the ashes; withered, naked, covered here and there with sickly foliage, they struggled mournfully up above the young growth which 'took their place, but could never replace them.'[1]

Some trees, still covered with leaves below, fling their lifeless, ruined branches upwards, as it were, in reproach and despair; in others, stout, dead, dry branches are thrust out of the midst of foliage still thick, though with none of the luxuriant abundance of old; others have fallen altogether, and lie rotting like corpses on the ground. And—who could have dreamed of this in former days?—there was no shade—no shade to be found anywhere in Tchapligino! 'Ah,' I thought, looking at the dying trees: 'isn't it shameful and bitter for you?' . . . Koltsov's lines recurred to me:

'What has become
Of the mighty voices,
The haughty strength,
The royal pomp?
Where now is the
Wealth of green? . . .

[1] In 1840 there were severe frosts, and no snow fell up to the very end of December; all the wintercorn was frozen, and many splendid oak-forests were destroyed by that merciless winter. It will be hard to replace them; the productive force of the land is apparently diminishing; in the 'interdicted' wastelands (visited by processions with holy images, and so not to be touched), instead of the noble trees of former days, birches and aspens grow of themselves; and, indeed, they have no idea among us of planting woods at all.—*Author's Note.*

'How is it, Ardalion Mihalitch,' I began, 'that they didn't fell these trees the very next year? You see they won't give for them now a tenth of what they would have done before.'

He merely shrugged his shoulders.

'You should have asked my aunt that; the timber merchants came, offered money down, pressed the matter, in fact.'

'*Mein Gott! mein Gott!*' Von der Kock cried at every step. 'Vat a bity, vat a bity!'

'What's a bity!' observed my neighbour with a smile.

'That is; how bitiful, I meant to say.'

What particularly aroused his regrets were the oaks lying on the ground—and, indeed, many a miller would have given a good sum for them. But the constable Arhip preserved an unruffled composure, and did not indulge in any lamentations; on the contrary, he seemed even to jump over them and crack his whip on them with a certain satisfaction.

We were getting near the place where they were cutting down the trees, when suddenly a shout and hurried talk was heard, following on the crash of a falling tree, and a few instants after a young peasant, pale and dishevelled, dashed out of the thicket towards us.

'What is it? where are you running?' Ardalion Mihalitch asked him.

He stopped at once.

'Ah, Ardalion Mihalitch, sir, an accident!'

'What is it?'

'Maksim, sir, crushed by a tree.'

'How did it happen? . . . Maksim the foreman?'

'The foreman, sir. We'd started cutting an ash-tree, and he was standing looking on. . . . He stood there a bit, and then off he went to the well for some water—wanted a drink, seemingly—when suddenly the ash-tree began creaking and coming straight towards him. We shout to him: 'Run, run, run!' . . . He should have rushed to one side, but he up and ran straight before him. . . . He was scared, to be sure. The ash-tree covered him with its top branches. But why it fell so soon, the Lord only knows! . . . Perhaps it was rotten at the core.'

'And so it crushed Maksim?'

'Yes, sir.'

'To death?'

'No, sir, he's still alive—but as good as dead; his arms and legs are crushed. I was running for Seliverstitch, for the doctor.'

Ardalion Mihalitch told the constable to gallop to the village for Seliverstitch, while he himself pushed on at a quick trot to the clearing. . . I followed him.

We found poor Maksim on the ground. The peasants were standing about him. We got off our horses. He hardly moaned at all; from time to time he opened his eyes wide, looked round, as it were, in astonishment, and bit his lips, fast turn-

ing blue. . . . The lower part of his face was twitching; his hair was matted on his brow; his breast heaved irregularly: he was dying. The light shade of a young lime-tree glided softly over his face.

We bent down to him. He recognised Ardalion Mihalitch.

'Please sir,' he said to him, hardly articulately, 'send . . . for the priest . . . tell . . . the Lord . . . has punished me . . . arms, legs, all smashed . . . to-day's . . . Sunday . . . and I . . . I . . . see . . . didn't let the lads off . . . work.'

He ceased, out of breath.

'And my money . . . for my wife . . . after deducting. . . . Onesim here knows . . . whom I . . . what I owe.'

'We've sent for the doctor, Maksim,' said my neighbour; 'perhaps you may not die yet.'

He tried to open his eyes, and with an effort raised the lids.

'No, I'm dying. Here . . . here it is coming . . . here it. . . . Forgive me, lads, if in any way. . . .'

'God will forgive you, Maksim Andreitch,' said the peasants thickly with one voice, and they took off their caps; 'do you forgive us!'

He suddenly shook his head despairingly, his breast heaved with a painful effort, and he fell back again.

'We can't let him lie here and die, though,' cried Ardalion Mihalitch; 'lads, give us the mat from the cart, and carry him to the hospital.'

Two men ran to the cart.

'I bought a horse . . . yesterday,' faltered the dying man, 'off Efim . . . Sitchovsky . . . paid earnest money . . . so the horse is mine. . . . Give it . . . to my wife. . . .'

They began to move him on to the mat. . . . He trembled all over, like a wounded bird, and stiffened. . . .

'He is dead,' muttered the peasants.

We mounted our horses in silence and rode away.

The death of poor Maksim set me musing. How wonderfully indeed the Russian peasant dies! The temper in which he meets his end cannot be called indifference or stolidity; he dies as though he were performing a solemn rite, coolly and simply.

A few years ago a peasant belonging to another neighbour of mine in the country got burnt in the drying shed, where the corn is put. (He would have remained there, but a passing pedlar pulled him out half-dead; he plunged into a tub of water, and with a run broke down the door of the burning outhouse.) I went to his hut to see him. It was dark, smoky, stifling, in the hut. I asked, 'Where is the sick man?' 'There, sir, on the stove,' the sorrowing peasant woman answered me in a sing-song voice. I went up; the peasant was lying covered with a sheepskin, breathing heavily. 'Well, how do you feel?' The injured man stirred on the stove; all over burns, within sight

of death as he was, tried to rise. 'Lie still, lie still, lie still. . . . Well, how are you?' 'In a bad way, surely,' said he. 'Are you in pain?' No answer. 'Is there anything you want?'—No answer. 'Shouldn't I send you some tea, or anything.' 'There's no need.' I moved away from him and sat down on the bench. I sat there a quarter of an hour; I sat there half an hour—the silence of the tomb in the hut. In the corner behind the table under the holy pictures crouched a little girl of twelve years old, eating a piece of bread. Her mother threatened her every now and then. In the outer room there was coming and going, noise and talk: the brother's wife was chopping cabbage. 'Hey, Aksinya,' said the injured man at last. 'What?' 'Some kvas.' Aksinya gave him some kvas. Silence again. I asked in a whisper, 'Have they given him the sacrament?' 'Yes.' So, then, everything was in order: he was waiting for death, that was all. I could not bear it, and went away. . . .

Again, I recall how I went one day to the hospital in the village of Krasnogorye to see the surgeon Kapiton, a friend of mine, and an enthusiastic sportsman.

This hospital consisted of what had once been the lodge of the manor-house; the lady of the manor had founded it herself; in other words, she ordered a blue board to be nailed up above the door with an inscription in white letters: 'Krasnogorye Hospital,' and had herself handed to Kapi-

ton a red album to record the names of the patients in. On the first page of this album one of the toadying parasites of this Lady Bountiful had inscribed the following lines:

'Dans ces beaux lieux, où règne l'allégresse
Ce temple fut ouvert par la Beauté;
De vos seigneurs admirez la tendresse
Bons habitants de Krasnogorié!'

while another gentleman had written below:

'Et moi aussi j'aime la nature!
'JEAN KOBYLIATNIKOFF.'

The surgeon bought six beds at his own expense, and had set to work in a thankful spirit to heal God's people. Besides him, the staff consisted of two persons; an engraver, Pavel, liable to attacks of insanity, and a one-armed peasant woman, Melikitrisa, who performed the duties of cook. Both of them mixed the medicines and dried and infused herbs; they, too, controlled the patients when they were delirious. The insane engraver was sullen in appearance and sparing of words; at night he would sing a song about 'lovely Venus,' and would besiege every one he met with a request for permission to marry a girl called Malanya, who had long been dead. The one-armed peasant woman used to beat him and set him to look after the turkeys. Well, one day I was at Kapiton's. We had begun talking over our last day's shooting, when suddenly a cart drove into the yard, drawn by an exceptionally

stout horse, such as are only found belonging to millers. In the cart sat a thick-set peasant, in a new greatcoat, with a beard streaked with grey. 'Hullo, Vassily Dmitritch,' Kapiton shouted from the window; 'please come in. . . . The miller of Liobovshin,' he whispered to me. The peasant climbed groaning out of the cart, came into the surgeon's room, and after looking for the holy pictures, crossed himself, bowing to them. 'Well, Vassily Dmitritch, any news? . . . But you must be ill; you don't look well.' 'Yes, Kapiton Timofeitch, there's something not right.' 'What's wrong with you?' 'Well, it was like this, Kapiton Timofeitch. Not long ago I bought some mill-stones in the town, so I took them home, and as I went to lift them out of the cart, I strained myself, or something; I'd a sort of rick in the loins, as though something had been torn away, and ever since I've been out of sorts. To-day I feel worse than ever.' 'Hm,' commented Kapiton, and he took a pinch of snuff; 'that's a rupture, no doubt. But is it long since this happened?' 'It's ten days now.' 'Ten days?' (The surgeon drew a long inward breath and shook his head.) 'Let me examine you.' 'Well, Vassily Dmitritch,' he pronounced at last, 'I am sorry for you, heartily sorry, but things aren't right with you at all; you're seriously ill; stay here with me; I will do everything I can, for my part, though I can't answer for anything.' 'So bad as that?' muttered the astounded peasant. 'Yes, Vassily Dmitritch,

it is bad ; if you 'd come to me a day or two sooner, it would have been nothing much ; I could have cured you in a trice ; but now inflammation has set in ; before we know where we are, there 'll be mortification.' 'But it can't be, Kapiton Timofeitch.' 'I tell you it is so.' 'But how comes it?' (The surgeon shrugged his shoulders.) 'And I must die for a trifle like that?' 'I don't say that . . only you must stop here.' The peasant pondered and pondered, his eyes fixed on the floor, then he glanced up at us, scratched his head, and picked up his cap. 'Where are you off to, Vassily Dmitritch?' 'Where? why, home to be sure, if it 's so bad. I must put things to rights, if it 's like that.' 'But you 'll do yourself harm, Vassily Dmitritch ; you will, really ; I 'm surprised how you managed to get here ; you must stop.' 'No, brother, Kapiton Timofeitch, if I must die, I 'll die at home ; why die here? I 've got a home, and the Lord knows how it will end.' 'No one can tell yet, Vassily Dmitritch, how it will end. . . . Of course, there is danger, considerable danger ; there's no disputing that . . . but for that reason you ought to stay here.' (The peasant shook his head.) 'No, Kapiton Timofeitch, I won't stay . . . but perhaps you will prescribe me a medicine.' 'Medicine alone will be no good.' 'I won't stay, I tell you.' 'Well, as you like. . . . Mind you don't blame me for it afterwards."

The surgeon tore a page out of the album, and, writing out a prescription, gave him some advice

as to what he could do besides. The peasant took the sheet of paper, gave Kapiton half-a-rouble, went out of the room, and took his seat in the cart. 'Well, good-bye, Kapiton Timofeitch, don't remember evil against me, and remember my orphans, if anything. . . .' 'Oh, do stay, Vassily!' The peasant simply shook his head, struck the horse with the reins, and drove out of the yard. The road was muddy and full of holes; the miller drove cautiously, without hurry, guiding his horse skilfully, and nodding to the acquaintances he met. Three days later he was dead.

The Russians, in general, meet death in a marvellous way. Many of the dead come back now to my memory. I recall you, my old friend, who left the university with no degree, Avenir Sorokoumov, noblest, best of men! I see once again your sickly, consumptive face, your lank brown tresses, your gentle smile, your ecstatic glance, your long limbs; I can hear your weak, caressing voice. You lived at a Great Russian landowner's, called Gur Krupyanikov, taught his children, Fofa and Zyozya, Russian grammar, geography, and history, patiently bore all the ponderous jokes of the said Gur, the coarse familiarities of the steward, the vulgar pranks of the spiteful urchins; with a bitter smile, but without repining, you complied with the caprices of their bored and exacting mother; but to make up for it all, what bliss, what peace was yours in the evening, after supper, when, free at last of all duties,

you sat at the window pensively smoking a pipe, or greedily turned the pages of a greasy and mutilated number of some solid magazine, brought you from the town by the land-surveyor—just such another poor, homeless devil as yourself! How delighted you were then with any sort of poem or novel; how readily the tears started into your eyes; with what pleasure you laughed; what genuine love for others, what generous sympathy for everything good and noble, filled your pure youthful soul! One must tell the truth: you were not distinguished by excessive sharpness of wit; Nature had endowed you with neither memory nor industry; at the university you were regarded as one of the least promising students; at lectures you slumbered, at examinations you preserved a solemn silence; but who was beaming with delight and breathless with excitement at a friend's success, a friend's triumphs? . . . Avenir! . . . Who had a blind faith in the lofty destiny of his friends? who extolled them with pride? who championed them with angry vehemence? who was innocent of envy as of vanity? who was ready for the most disinterested self-sacrifice? who eagerly gave way to men who were not worthy to untie his latchet? . . . That was you, all you, our good Avenir! I remember how broken-heartedly you parted from your comrades, when you were going away to be a tutor in the country; you were haunted by presentiment of evil. . . . And, indeed, your lot was

a sad one in the country ; you had no one there to listen to with veneration, no one to admire, no one to love. . . . The neighbours—rude sons of the steppes, and polished gentlemen alike—treated you as a tutor : some, with rudeness and neglect, others carelessly. Besides, you were not prepossessing in person ; you were shy, given to blushing, getting hot and stammering. . . . Even your health was no better for the country air : you wasted like a candle, poor fellow ! It is true your room looked out into the garden ; wild cherries, apple-trees, and limes strewed their delicate blossoms on your table, your ink-stand, your books ; on the wall hung a blue silk watch-pocket, a parting present from a kind-hearted, sentimental German governess with flaxen curls and little blue eyes ; and sometimes an old friend from Moscow would come out to you and throw you into ecstasies with new poetry, often even with his own. But, oh, the loneliness, the insufferable slavery of a tutor's lot ! the impossibility of escape, the endless autumns and winters, the ever-advancing disease ! . . . Poor, poor Avenir !

I paid Sorokoumov a visit not long before his death. He was then hardly able to walk. The landowner, Gur Krupyanikov, had not turned him out of the house, but had given up paying him a salary, and had taken another tutor for Zyozya. . . . Fofa had been sent to a school of cadets. Avenir was sitting near the window in an old easy-chair. It was exquisite weather. The clear

autumn sky was a bright blue above the dark-brown line of bare limes; here and there a few last leaves of lurid gold rustled and whispered about them. The earth had been covered with frost, now melting into dewdrops in the sun, whose ruddy rays fell aslant across the pale grass; there was a faint crisp resonance in the air; the voices of the labourers in the garden reached us clearly and distinctly. Avenir wore an old Bokhara dressing-gown; a green neckerchief threw a deathly hue over his terribly sunken face. He was greatly delighted to see me, held out his hand, began talking and coughing at once. I made him be quiet, and sat down by him. . . . On Avenir's knee lay a manuscript book of Koltsov's poems, carefully copied out; he patted it with a smile. 'That's a poet,' he stammered, with an effort repressing his cough; and he fell to declaiming in a voice scarcely audible:

'Can the eagle's wings
Be chained and fettered?
Can the pathways of heaven
Be closed against him?'

I stopped him: the doctor had forbidden him to talk. I knew what would please him. Sorokoumov never, as they say, 'kept up' with the science of the day; but he was always anxious to know what results the leading intellects had reached. Sometimes he would get an old friend into a corner and begin questioning him; he would listen and wonder, take every word on trust, and

even repeat it all after him. He took a special interest in German philosophy. I began discoursing to him about Hegel (this all happened long ago, as you may gather). Avenir nodded his head approvingly, raised his eyebrows, smiled, and whispered: 'I see! I see! ah, that's splendid! splendid!' . . . The childish curiosity of this poor, dying, homeless outcast, moved me, I confess, to tears. It must be noted that Avenir, unlike the general run of consumptives, did not deceive himself in regard to his disease . . . . But what of that? —he did not sigh, nor grieve; he did not even once refer to his position. . . .

Rallying his strength, he began talking of Moscow, of old friends, of Pushkin, of the drama, of Russian literature; he recalled our little suppers, the heated debates of our circle; with regret he uttered the names of two or three friends who were dead. . . .

'Do you remember Dasha?' he went on. 'Ah, there was a heart of pure gold! What a heart! and how she loved me! . . . What has become of her now? Wasted and fallen away, poor dear, I daresay!'

I had not the courage to disillusion the sick man; and, indeed, why should he know that his Dasha was now broader than she was long, and that she was living under the protection of some merchants, the brothers Kondatchkov, that she used powder and paint, and was for ever swearing and scolding?

'But can't we,' I thought, looking at his wasted face, 'get him away from here? Perhaps there may still be a chance of curing him.' But Avenir cut short my suggestion.

'No, brother, thanks,' he said; 'it makes no difference where one dies. I shan't live till the winter, you see. . . . Why give trouble for nothing? I 'm used to this house. It 's true the people . . .'

'They 're unkind, eh?' I put in.

'No, not unkind! but wooden-headed creatures. However, I can't complain of them. There are neighbours: there 's a Mr. Kasatkin's daughter, a cultivated, kind, charming girl . . . not proud . . .'

Sorokoumov began coughing again.

'I shouldn't mind anything,' he went on, after taking breath, 'if they 'd only let me smoke my pipe. . . . But I 'll have my pipe, if I die for it!' he added, with a sly wink. 'Thank God, I have had life enough! I have known so many fine people.

'But you should, at least, write to your relations,' I interrupted.

'Why write to them? They can't be any help; when I die they 'll hear of it. But, why talk about it . . . I 'd rather you 'd tell me what you saw abroad.'

I began to tell him my experiences. He seemed positively to gloat over my story. Towards evening I left, and ten days later I received the following letter from Mr. Krupyanikov:

'I have the honour to inform you, my dear sir, that your friend, the student, living in my house, Mr. Avenir

Sorokoumov, died at two o'clock in the afternoon, three days ago, and was buried to-day, at my expense, in the parish church. He asked me to forward you the books and manuscripts enclosed herewith. He was found to have twenty-two roubles and a half, which, with the rest of his belongings, pass into the possession of his relatives. Your friend died fully conscious, and, I may say, with so little sensibility that he showed no signs of regret even when the whole family of us took a last farewell of him. My wife, Kleopatra Aleksandrovna, sends you her regards. The death of your friend has, of course, affected her nerves; as regards myself, I am, thank God, in good health, and have the honour to remain, your humble servant,' 'G. KRUPYANIKOV.'

Many more examples recur to me, but one cannot relate everything. I will confine myself to one.

I was present at an old lady's death-bed; the priest had begun reading the prayers for the dying over her, but, suddenly noticing that the patient seemed to be actually dying, he made haste to give her the cross to kiss. The lady turned away with an air of displeasure. 'You're in too great a hurry, father,' she said, in a voice almost inarticulate; 'in too great a hurry.' . . . She kissed the cross, put her hand under the pillow and expired. Under the pillow was a silver rouble; she had meant to pay the priest for the service at her own death. . . .

Yes, the Russians die in a wonderful way.

XVII

THE SINGERS

THE small village of Kolotovka once belonged to a lady known in the neighbourhood by the nickname of Skin-flint, in illusion to her keen business habits (her real name is lost in oblivion), but has of late years been the property of a German from Petersburg. The village lies on the slope of a barren hill, which is cut in half from top to bottom by a tremendous ravine. It is a yawning chasm, with shelving sides hollowed out by the action of rain and snow, and it winds along the very centre of the village street; it separates the two sides of the unlucky hamlet far more than a river would do, for a river could, at least, be crossed by a bridge. A few gaunt willows creep timorously down its sandy sides; at the very bottom, which is dry and yellow as copper, lie huge slabs of argillaceous rock. A cheerless position, there's no denying, yet all the surrounding inhabitants know the road to Kolotovka well; they go there often, and are always glad to go.

At the very summit of the ravine, a few paces

from the point where it starts as a narrow fissure in the earth, there stands a small square hut. It stands alone, apart from all the others. It is thatched, and has a chimney; one window keeps watch like a sharp eye over the ravine, and on winter evenings when it is lighted from within, it is seen far away in the dim frosty fog, and its twinkling light is the guiding star of many a peasant on his road. A blue board is nailed up above the door; this hut is a tavern, called the 'Welcome Resort.' Spirits are sold here probably no cheaper than the usual price, but it is far more frequented than any other establishment of the same sort in the neighbourhood. The explanation of this is to be found in the tavern-keeper, Nikolai Ivanitch.

Nikolai Ivanitch—once a slender, curly-headed and rosy-cheeked young fellow, now an excessively stout, grizzled man with a fat face, sly and good-natured little eyes, and a shiny forehead, with wrinkles like lines drawn all over it—has lived for more than twenty years in Kolotovka. Nikolai Ivanitch is a shrewd, acute fellow, like the majority of tavern-keepers. Though he makes no conspicuous effort to please or to talk to people, he has the art of attracting and keeping customers, who find it particularly pleasant to sit at his bar under the placid and genial, though alert eye, of the phlegmatic host. He has a great deal of common sense; he thoroughly understands the landowner's conditions of life, the peasant's, and the

tradesman's. He could give sensible advice on difficult points, but, like a cautious man and an egoist, prefers to stand aloof, and at most—and that only in the case of his favourite customers—by remote hints, dropped, as it were, unintentionally, to lead them into the true way. He is an authority on everything that is of interest or importance to a Russian; on horses and cattle, on timber, bricks, and crockery, on woollen stuffs and on leather, on songs and dances. When he has no customers he is usually sitting like a sack on the ground before the door of his hut, his thin legs tucked under him, exchanging a friendly greeting with every passer-by. He has seen a great deal in his time; many a score of petty landowners, who used to come to him for spirits, he has seen pass away before him; he knows everything that is done for eighty miles round, and never gossips, never gives a sign of knowing what is unsuspected by the most keen-sighted police-officer. He keeps his own counsel, laughs, and makes his glasses ring. His neighbours respect him; the civilian general Shtcherpetenko, the landowner highest in rank in the district, gives him a condescending nod whenever he drives past his little house. Nikolai Ivanitch is a man of influence; he made a notorious horse-stealer return a horse he had taken from the stable of one of his friends; he brought the peasants of a neighbouring village to their senses when they refused to accept a new overseer, and so

on. It must not be imagined, though, that he does this from love of justice, from devotion to his neighbour—no! he simply tries to prevent anything that might, in any way, interfere with his ease and comfort. Nikolai Ivanitch is married, and has children. His wife, a smart, sharp-nosed and keen-eyed woman of the tradesman class, has grown somewhat stout of late years, like her husband. He relies on her in everything, and she keeps the key of the cash-box. Drunken brawlers are afraid of her; she does not like them; they bring little profit and make a great deal of noise: those who are taciturn and surly in their cups are more to her taste. Nikolai Ivanitch's children are still small; the first four all died, but those that are left take after their parents: it is a pleasure to look at their intelligent, healthy little faces.

It was an insufferably hot day in July when, slowly dragging my feet along, I went up alongside the Kolotovka ravine with my dog towards the Welcome Resort. The sun blazed, as it were, fiercely in the sky, baking the parched earth relentlessly; the air was thick with stifling dust. Glossy crows and ravens with gaping beaks looked plaintively at the passers-by, as though asking for sympathy; only the sparrows did not droop, but, pluming their feathers, twittered more vigorously than ever as they quarrelled among the hedges, or flew up all together from the dusty road, and hovered in grey clouds over the green hempfields. I was tormented by thirst. There was no water

near: in Kolotovka, as in many other villages of the steppes, the peasants, having no spring or well, drink a sort of thin mud out of the pond. . . . For no one could call that repulsive beverage water. I wanted to ask for a glass of beer or kvas at Nikolai Ivanitch's.

It must be confessed that at no time of the year does Kolotovka present a very cheering spectacle; but it has a particularly depressing effect when the relentless rays of a dazzling July sun pour down full upon the brown, tumble-down roofs of the houses and the deep ravine, and the parched, dusty common over which the thin, long-legged hens are straying hopelessly, and the remains of the old manor-house, now a hollow, grey framework of aspenwood, with holes instead of windows, overgrown with nettles, wormwood, and rank grass, and the pond black, as though charred and covered with goose feathers, with its edge of half-dried mud, and its broken-down dyke, near which, on the finely trodden, ash-like earth, sheep, breathless and gasping with the heat, huddle dejectedly together, their heads drooping with weary patience, as though waiting for this insufferable heat to pass at last. With weary steps I drew near Nikolai Ivanitch's dwelling, arousing in the village children the usual wonder manifested in a concentrated, meaningless stare, and in the dogs an indignation expressed in such hoarse and furious barking that it seemed as if it were tearing their very entrails, and left them breathless and

choking, when suddenly in the tavern doorway there appeared a tall peasant without a cap, in a frieze cloak, girt about below his waist with a blue handkerchief. He looked like a house-serf; thick grey hair stood up in disorder above his withered and wrinkled face. He was calling to some one hurriedly, waving his arms, which obviously were not quite under his control. It could be seen that he had been drinking already.

'Come, come along!' he stammered, raising his shaggy eyebrows with an effort. 'Come, Blinkard, come along! Ah, brother, how you creep along, 'pon my word! It's too bad, brother. They're waiting for you within, and here you crawl along. . . . Come.'

'Well, I'm coming, I'm coming!' called a jarring voice, and from behind a hut a little, short, fat, lame man came into sight. He wore a rather tidy cloth coat, pulled half on, and a high pointed cap right over his brows, which gave his round plump face a sly and comic expression. His little yellow eyes moved restlessly about, his thin lips wore a continual forced smile, while his sharp, long nose peered forward saucily in front like a rudder. 'I'm coming, my dear fellow.' He went hobbling towards the tavern. 'What are you calling me for? . . . Who's waiting for me?'

'What am I calling you for?' repeated the man in the frieze coat reproachfully. 'You're a queer fish, Blinkard: we call you to come to the tavern, and you ask what for? Here are honest folks

all waiting for you: Yashka the Turk, and the Wild Master, and the booth-keeper from Zhizdry. Yashka's got a bet on with the booth-keeper: the stake's a pot of beer—for the one that does best, sings the best, I mean . . . do you see?'

'Is Yashka going to sing?' said the man addressed as Blinkard, with lively interest. 'But isn't it your humbug, Gabbler?'

'I'm not humbugging,' answered the Gabbler, with dignity; 'it's you are crazy. I should think he would sing since he's got a bet on it, you precious innocent, you noodle, Blinkard!'

'Well, come in, simpleton!' retorted the Blinkard.

'Then give us a kiss at least, lovey,' stammered the Gabbler, opening wide his arms.

'Get out, you great softy!' responded the Blinkard contemptuously, giving him a poke with his elbow, and both, stooping, entered the low doorway.

The conversation I had overheard roused my curiosity exceedingly. More than once rumours had reached me of Yashka the Turk as the best singer in the vicinity, and here was an opportunity all at once of hearing him in competition with another master of the art. I quickened my steps and went into the house.

Few of my readers have probably had an opportunity of getting a good view of any village taverns, but we sportsmen go everywhere. They are constructed on an exceedingly simple plan. They usually consist of a dark outer-shed, and an inner room with a chimney, divided in two by a parti-

tion, behind which none of the customers have a right to go. In this partition there is a wide opening cut above a broad oak table. At this table or bar the spirits are served. Sealed up bottles of various sizes stand on the shelves, right opposite the opening. In the front part of the room, devoted to customers, there are benches, two or three empty barrels, and a corner table. Village taverns are for the most part rather dark, and you hardly ever see on their wainscotted walls any of the glaring cheap prints which few huts are without.

When I went into the Welcome Resort, a fairly large party were already assembled there.

In his usual place behind the bar, almost filling up the entire opening in the partition, stood Nikolai Ivanitch in a striped print shirt; with a lazy smile on his full face, he poured out with his plump white hand two glasses of spirits for the Blinkard and the Gabbler as they came in; behind him, in a corner near the window, could be seen his sharp-eyed wife. In the middle of the room was standing Yashka the Turk, a thin, graceful fellow of three-and-twenty, dressed in a long skirted coat of blue nankin. He looked a smart factory hand, and could not, to judge by his appearance, boast of very good health. His hollow cheeks, his large, restless grey eyes, his straight nose, with its delicate mobile nostrils, his pale brown curls brushed back over the sloping white brow, his full but beautiful, expressive lips, and his whole face

betrayed a passionate and sensitive nature. He was in a state of great excitement; he blinked, his breathing was hurried, his hands shook, as though in fever, and he was really in a fever—that sudden fever of excitement which is so well-known to all who have to speak and sing before an audience. Near him stood a man of about forty, with broad shoulders and broad jaws, with a low forehead, narrow Tartar eyes, a short flat nose, a square chin, and shining black hair coarse as bristles. The expression of his face—a swarthy face, with a sort of leaden hue in it—and especially of his pale lips, might almost have been called savage, if it had not been so still and dreamy. He hardly stirred a muscle; he only looked slowly about him like a bull under the yoke. He was dressed in a sort of surtout, not over new, with smooth brass buttons; an old black silk handkerchief was twisted round his immense neck. He was called the Wild Master. Right opposite him, on a bench under the holy pictures, was sitting Yashka's rival, the booth-keeper from Zhizdry; he was a short, stoutly-built man about thirty, pock-marked, and curly-headed, with a blunt, turn-up nose, lively brown eyes, and a scanty beard. He looked keenly about him, and, sitting with his hands under him, he kept carelessly swinging his legs and tapping with his feet, which were encased in stylish top-boots with a coloured edging. He wore a new thin coat of grey cloth, with a plush collar, in sharp contrast with

the crimson shirt below, buttoned close across the chest. In the opposite corner, to the right of the door, a peasant sat at the table in a narrow, shabby smock-frock, with a huge rent on the shoulder. The sunlight fell in a narrow, yellowish streak through the dusty panes of the two small windows, but it seemed as if it struggled in vain with the habitual darkness of the room; all the objects in it were dimly, as it were, patchily lighted up. On the other hand, it was almost cool in the room, and the sense of stifling heat dropped off me like a weary load directly I crossed the threshold.

My entrance, I could see, was at first somewhat disconcerting to Nikolai Ivanitch's customers; but observing that he greeted me as a friend, they were reassured, and took no more notice of me. I asked for some beer and sat down in the corner, near the peasant in the ragged smock.

'Well, well,' piped the Gabbler, suddenly draining a glass of spirits at one gulp, and accompanying his exclamation with the strange gesticulations, without which he seemed unable to utter a single word; 'what are we waiting for? If we're going to begin, then begin. Hey, Yasha?'

'Begin, begin,' chimed in Nikolai Ivanitch approvingly.

'Let's begin, by all means,' observed the booth-keeper coolly, with a self-confident smile; 'I'm ready.'

'And I'm ready,' Yakov pronounced in a voice thrilled with excitement.

'Well, begin, lads,' whined the Blinkard. But, in spite of the unanimously expressed desire, neither began; the booth-keeper did not even get up from the bench—they all seemed to be waiting for something.

'Begin!' said the Wild Master sharply and sullenly. Yashka started. The booth-keeper pulled down his girdle and cleared his throat.

'But who's to begin?' he inquired in a slightly changed voice of the Wild Master, who still stood motionless in the middle of the room, his stalwart legs wide apart and his powerful arms thrust up to the elbow into his breeches pockets.

'You, you, booth-keeper,' stammered the Gabbler; 'you, to be sure, brother.'

The Wild Master looked at him from under his brows. The Gabbler gave a faint squeak, in confusion looked away at the ceiling, twitched his shoulder, and said no more.

'Cast lots,' the Wild Master pronounced emphatically; 'and the pot on the table.'

Nikolai Ivanitch bent down, and with a gasp picked up the pot of beer from the floor and set it on the table.

The Wild Master glanced at Yakov, and said 'Come!'

Yakov fumbled in his pockets, took out a halfpenny, and marked it with his teeth. The booth-keeper pulled from under the skirts of his long coat a new leather purse, deliberately untied the string, and shaking out a quantity of small

change into his hand, picked out a new halfpenny. The Gabbler held out his dirty cap, with its broken peak hanging loose; Yakov dropped his halfpenny in, and the booth-keeper his.

'You must pick out one,' said the Wild Master, turning to the Blinkard.

The Blinkard smiled complacently, took the cap in both hands, and began shaking it.

For an instant a profound silence reigned; the halfpennies clinked faintly, jingling against each other. I looked round attentively; every face wore an expression of intense expectation; the Wild Master himself showed signs of uneasiness; my neighbour, even, the peasant in the tattered smock, craned his neck inquisitively. The Blinkard put his hand into the cap and took out the booth-keeper's halfpenny; every one drew a long breath. Yakov flushed, and the booth-keeper passed his hand over his hair.

'There, I said you'd begin,' cried the Gabbler; 'didn't I say so?'

'There, there, don't cluck,' remarked the Wild Master contemptuously. 'Begin,' he went on, with a nod to the booth-keeper.

'What song am I to sing?' asked the booth-keeper, beginning to be nervous.

'What you choose,' answered the Blinkard; 'sing what you think best.'

'What you choose, to be sure,' Nikolai Ivanitch chimed in, slowly smoothing his hand on his breast, 'you're quite at liberty about that. Sing

what you like; only sing well; and we'll give a fair decision afterwards.'

'A fair decision, of course,' put in the Gabbler, licking the edge of his empty glass.

'Let me clear my throat a bit, mates,' said the booth-keeper, fingering the collar of his coat.

'Come, come, no nonsense—begin!' protested the Wild Master, and he looked down.

The booth-keeper thought a minute, shook his head, and stepped forward. Yakov's eyes were riveted upon him.

But before I enter upon a description of the contest itself, I think it will not be amiss to say a few words about each of the personages taking part in my story. The lives of some of them were known to me already when I met them in the Welcome Resort; I collected some facts about the others later on.

Let us begin with the Gabbler. This man's real name was Evgraf Ivanovitch; but no one in the whole neighbourhood knew him as anything but the Gabbler, and he himself referred to himself by that nickname; so well did it fit him. Indeed, nothing could have been more appropriate to his insignificant, ever-restless features. He was a dissipated, unmarried house-serf, whose own masters had long ago got rid of him, and who, without any employment, without earning a half-penny, found means to get drunk every day at other people's expense. He had a great number of acquaintances who treated him to drinks of

spirits and tea, though they could not have said why they did so themselves; for, far from being entertaining in company, he bored every one with his meaningless chatter, his insufferable familiarity, his spasmodic gestures and incessant, unnatural laugh. He could neither sing nor dance; he had never said a clever, or even a sensible thing in his life; he chattered away, telling lies about everything—a regular Gabbler! And yet not a single drinking party for thirty miles around took place without his lank figure turning up among the guests; so that they were used to him by now, and put up with his presence as a necessary evil. They all, it is true, treated him with contempt; but the Wild Master was the only one who knew how to keep his foolish sallies in check.

The Blinkard was not in the least like the Gabbler. His nickname, too, suited him, though he was no more given to blinking than other people; it is a well-known fact, that the Russian peasants have a talent for finding good nicknames. In spite of my endeavours to get more detailed information about this man's past, many passages in his life have remained spots of darkness to me, and probably to many other people; episodes, buried, as the bookmen say, in the darkness of oblivion. I could only find out that he was once a coachman in the service of an old childless lady; that he had run away with three horses he was in charge of; had been lost for a whole year, and no doubt, convinced by experience of the drawbacks

and hardships of a wandering life, he had gone back, a cripple, and flung himself at his mistress's feet. He succeeded in a few years in smoothing over his offence by his exemplary conduct, and, gradually getting higher in her favour, at last gained her complete confidence, was made a bailiff, and on his mistress's death, turned out—in what way was never known—to have received his freedom. He got admitted into the class of tradesmen; rented patches of market garden from the neighbours; grew rich, and now was living in ease and comfort. He was a man of experience, who knew on which side his bread was buttered; was more actuated by prudence than by either good or ill-nature; had knocked about, understood men, and knew how to turn them to his own advantage. He was cautious, and at the same time enterprising, like a fox; though he was as fond of gossip as an old woman, he never let out his own affairs, while he made everyone else talk freely of theirs. He did not affect to be a simpleton, though, as so many crafty men of his sort do; indeed it would have been difficult for him to take any one in, in that way; I have never seen a sharper, keener pair of eyes than his tiny cunning little 'peepers,' as they call them in Orel. They were never simply looking about; they were always looking one up and down and through and through. The Blinkard would sometimes ponder for weeks together over some apparently simple undertaking, and again he would suddenly decide

on a desperately bold line of action, which one would fancy would bring him to ruin. . . . But it would be sure to turn out all right; everything would go smoothly. He was lucky, and believed in his own luck, and believed in omens. He was exceedingly superstitious in general. He was not liked, because he would have nothing much to do with anyone, but he was respected. His whole family consisted of one little son, whom he idolised, and who, brought up by such a father, is likely to get on in the world. 'Little Blinkard 'll be his father over again,' is said of him already, in undertones by the old men, as they sit on their mud walls gossiping on summer evenings, and every one knows what that means; there is no need to say more.

As to Yashka the Turk and the booth-keeper, there is no need to say much about them. Yakov, called the Turk because he actually was descended from a Turkish woman, a prisoner from the war, was by nature an artist in every sense of the word, and by calling, a ladler in a paper factory belonging to a merchant. As for the booth-keeper, his career, I must own, I know nothing of; he struck me as being a smart townsman of the tradesman class, ready to turn his hand to anything. But the Wild Master calls for a more detailed account.

The first impression the sight of this man produced on you was a sense of coarse, heavy, irresistible power. He was clumsily built, a shambler,' as they say about us, but there was an

air of triumphant vigour about him, and—strange to say—his bear-like figure was not without a certain grace of its own, proceeding, perhaps, from his absolutely placid confidence in his own strength. It was hard to decide at first to what class this Hercules belonged: he did not look like a house-serf, nor a tradesman, nor an impoverished clerk out of work, nor a small ruined landowner, such as takes to being a huntsman or a fighting man; he was, in fact, quite individual. No one knew where he came from or what brought him into our district; it was said that he came of free peasant-proprietor stock, and had once been in the government service somewhere, but nothing positive was known about this; and indeed there was no one from whom one could learn—certainly not from him; he was the most silent and morose of men. So much so that no one knew for certain what he lived on; he followed no trade, visited no one, associated with scarcely anyone; yet he had money to spend; little enough, it is true, still he had some. In his behaviour he was not exactly retiring—retiring was not a word that could be applied to him: he lived as though he noticed no one about him, and cared for no one. The Wild Master (that was the nickname they had given him; his real name was Perevlyesov) enjoyed an immense influence in the whole district; he was obeyed with eager promptitude, though he had no kind of right to give orders to anyone, and did not himself evince the slightest pretension to authority over the people

with whom he came into casual contact. He spoke — they obeyed: strength always has an influence of its own. He scarcely drank at all, had nothing to do with women, and was passionately fond of singing. There was much that was mysterious about this man; it seemed as though vast forces sullenly reposed within him, knowing, as it were, that once roused, once bursting free, they were bound to crush him and everything they came in contact with; and I am greatly mistaken if, in this man's life, there had not been some such outbreak; if it was not owing to the lessons of experience, to a narrow escape from ruin, that he now kept himself so tightly in hand. What especially struck me in him was the combination of a sort of inborn natural ferocity, with an equally inborn generosity—a combination I have never met in any other man.

And so the booth-keeper stepped forward, and, half shutting his eyes, began singing in high falsetto. He had a fairly sweet and pleasant voice, though rather hoarse: he played with his voice like a woodlark, twisting and turning it in incessant roulades and trills up and down the scale, continually returning to the highest notes, which he held and prolonged with special care. Then he would break off, and again suddenly take up the first motive with a sort of go-ahead daring. His modulations were at times rather bold, at times rather comical; they would have given a connoisseur great satisfaction, and have made a

German furiously indignant. He was a Russian *tenore di grazia*, *ténor léger*. He sang a song to a lively dance-tune, the words of which, all that I could catch through the endless maze of variations, ejaculations and repetitions, were as follows:

'A tiny patch of land, young lass,
I'll plough for thee,
And tiny crimson flowers, young lass,
I'll sow for thee.'

He sang; all listened to him with great attention. He seemed to feel that he had to do with really musical people, and therefore was exerting himself to do his best. And they really are musical in our part of the country; the village of Sergievskoe on the Orel highroad is deservedly noted throughout Russia for its harmonious chorus-singing. The booth-keeper sang for a long while without evoking much enthusiasm in his audience; he lacked the support of a chorus; but at last, after one particularly bold flourish, which set even the Wild Master smiling, the Gabbler could not refrain from a shout of delight. Everyone was roused. The Gabbler and the Blinkard began joining in in an undertone, and exclaiming: 'Bravely done! . . . Take it, you rogue! . . . Sing it out, you serpent! Hold it! That shake again, you dog you! . . . May Herod confound your soul!' and so on. Nikolai Ivanitch behind the bar was nodding his head from side to side approvingly. The Gabbler at last was swinging his legs, tapping with

his feet and twitching his shoulder, while Yashka's eyes fairly glowed like coal, and he trembled all over like a leaf, and smiled nervously. The Wild Master alone did not change countenance, and stood motionless as before; but his eyes, fastened on the booth-keeper, looked somewhat softened, though the expression of his lips was still scornful. Emboldened by the signs of general approbation, the booth-keeper went off in a whirl of flourishes, and began to round off such trills, to turn such shakes off his tongue, and to make such furious play with his throat, that when at last, pale, exhausted, and bathed in hot perspiration, he uttered the last dying note, his whole body flung back, a general united shout greeted him in a violent outburst. The Gabbler threw himself on his neck and began strangling him in his long, bony arms; a flush came out on Nikolai Ivanitch's oily face, and he seemed to have grown younger; Yashka shouted like mad: 'Capital, capital!'—even my neighbour, the peasant in the torn smock, could not restrain himself, and with a blow of his fist on the table he cried: 'Aha! well done, damn my soul, well done!' And he spat on one side with an air of decision.

'Well, brother, you've given us a treat!' bawled the Gabbler, not releasing the exhausted booth-keeper from his embraces; 'you've given us a treat, there's no denying! You've won, brother, you've won! I congratulate you—the quart's yours! Yashka's miles behind you . . . I tell you: miles

. . . take my word for it.' (And again he hugged the booth-keeper to his breast.)

'There, let him alone, let him alone; there's no being rid of you' . . . said the Blinkard with vexation; 'let him sit down on the bench; he's tired, see . . . You're a ninny, brother, a perfect ninny! What are you sticking to him like a wet leaf for . . .'

'Well, then, let him sit down, and I'll drink to his health,' said the Gabbler, and he went up to the bar. 'At your expense, brother,' he added, addressing the booth-keeper.

The latter nodded, sat down on the bench, pulled a piece of cloth out of his cap, and began wiping his face, while the Gabbler, with greedy haste, emptied his glass, and, with a grunt, assumed, after the manner of confirmed drinkers, an expression of careworn melancholy.

'You sing beautifully, brother, beautifully,' Nikolai Ivanitch observed caressingly. 'And now it's your turn, Yasha; mind, now, don't be afraid. We shall see who's who; we shall see. The booth-keeper sings beautifully, though; 'pon my soul, he does.'

'Very beautifully,' observed Nikolai Ivanitch's wife, and she looked with a smile at Yakov.

'Beautifully, ha!' repeated my neighbour in an undertone.

'Ah, a wild man of the woods!' the Gabbler vociferated suddenly, and going up to the peasant with the rent on his shoulder, he pointed at him

with his finger, while he pranced about and went off into an insulting guffaw. 'Ha! ha! get along! wild man of the woods! Here's a ragamuffin from Woodland village! What brought you here?' he bawled amidst laughter.

The poor peasant was abashed, and was just about to get up and make off as fast as he could, when suddenly the Wild Master's iron voice was heard:

'What does the insufferable brute mean?' he articulated, grinding his teeth.

'I wasn't doing nothing,' muttered the Gabbler. 'I didn't . . . I only . . .'

'There, all right, shut up!' retorted the Wild Master. 'Yakov, begin!'

Yakov took himself by his throat:

'Well, really, brothers, . . . something. . . . Hm, I don't know, on my word, what. . . .'

'Come, that's enough; don't be timid. For shame! . . . why go back? . . . Sing the best you can, by God's gift.'

And the Wild Master looked down expectant. Yakov was silent for a minute; he glanced round, and covered his face with his hand. All had their eyes simply fastened upon him, especially the booth-keeper, on whose face a faint, involuntary uneasiness could be seen through his habitual expression of self-confidence and the triumph of his success. He leant back against the wall, and again put both hands under him, but did not swing his legs as before. When at last Yakov uncovered

his face it was pale as a dead man's; his eyes gleamed faintly under their drooping lashes. He gave a deep sigh, and began to sing. . . . The first sound of his voice was faint and unequal, and seemed not to come from his chest, but to be wafted from somewhere afar off, as though it had floated by chance into the room. A strange effect was produced on all of us by this trembling, resonant note; we glanced at one another, and Nikolai Ivanitch's wife seemed to draw herself up. This first note was followed by another, bolder and prolonged, but still obviously quivering, like a harpstring when suddenly struck by a stray finger it throbs in a last, swiftly-dying tremble; the second was followed by a third, and, gradually gaining fire and breadth, the strains swelled into a pathetic melody. 'Not one little path ran into the field,' he sang, and sweet and mournful it was in our ears. I have seldom, I must confess, heard a voice like it; it was slightly hoarse, and not perfectly true; there was even something morbid about it at first; but it had genuine depth of passion, and youth and sweetness and a sort of fascinating, careless, pathetic melancholy. A spirit of truth and fire, a Russian spirit, was sounding and breathing in that voice, and it seemed to go straight to your heart, to go straight to all that was Russian in it. The song swelled and flowed. Yakov was clearly carried away by enthusiasm; he was not timid now; he surrendered himself wholly to the rapture of his art; his voice no

longer trembled ; it quivered, but with the scarce perceptible inward quiver of passion, which pierces like an arrow to the very soul of the listeners ; and he steadily gained strength and firmness and breadth. I remember I once saw at sunset on a flat sandy shore, when the tide was low and the sea's roar came weighty and menacing from the distance, a great white sea-gull ; it sat motionless, its silky bosom facing the crimson glow of the setting sun, and only now and then opening wide its great wings to greet the well-known sea, to greet the sinking lurid sun : I recalled it, as I heard Yakov. He sang, utterly forgetful of his rival and all of us ; he seemed supported, as a bold swimmer by the waves, by our silent, passionate sympathy. He sang, and in every sound of his voice one seemed to feel something dear and akin to us, something of breadth and space, as though the familiar steppes were unfolding before our eyes and stretching away into endless distance. I felt the tears gathering in my bosom and rising to my eyes ; suddenly I was struck by dull, smothered sobs. . . . I looked round—the innkeeper's wife was weeping, her bosom pressed close to the window. Yakov threw a quick glance at her, and he sang more sweetly, more melodiously than ever ; Nikolai Ivanitch looked down ; the Blinkard turned away ; the Gabbler, quite touched, stood, his gaping mouth stupidly open ; the humble peasant was sobbing softly in the corner, and shaking his head with a plaintive murmur ; and on

the iron visage of the Wild Master, from under his overhanging brows there slowly rolled a heavy tear; the booth-keeper raised his clenched fist to his brow, and did not stir. . . . I don't know how the general emotion would have ended, if Yakov had not suddenly come to a full stop on a high, exceptionally shrill note — as though his voice had broken. No one called out, or even stirred; every one seemed to be waiting to see whether he was not going to sing more; but he opened his eyes as though wondering at our silence, looked round at all of us with a face of inquiry, and saw that the victory was his. . . .

'Yasha,' said the Wild Master, laying his hand on his shoulder, and he could say no more.

We all stood, as it were, petrified. The booth-keeper softly rose and went up to Yakov.

'You . . . yours . . . you've won,' he articulated at last with an effort, and rushed out of the room. His rapid, decided action, as it were, broke the spell; we all suddenly fell into noisy, delighted talk. The Gabbler bounded up and down, stammered and brandished his arms like mill-sails; the Blinkard limped up to Yakov and began kissing him; Nikolai Ivanitch got up and solemnly announced that he would add a second pot of beer from himself. The Wild Master laughed a sort of kind, simple laugh, which I should never have expected to see on his face; the humble peasant as he wiped his eyes, cheeks, nose, and beard on his sleeves, kept repeating in his corner: 'Ah, beautiful it was,

by God! blast me for the son of a dog, but it was fine!' while Nikolai Ivanitch's wife, her face red with weeping, got up quickly and went away, Yakov was enjoying his triumph like a child; his whole face was tranformed, his eyes especially fairly glowed with happiness. They dragged him to the bar; he beckoned the weeping peasant up to it, and sent the innkeeper's little son to look after the booth-keeper, who was not found, however; and the festivities began. 'You 'll sing to us again; you 're going to sing to us till evening,' the Gabbler declared, flourishing his hands in the air.

I took one more look at Yakov and went out. I did not want to stay—I was afraid of spoiling the impression I had received. But the heat was as insupportable as before. It seemed hanging in a thick, heavy layer right over the earth; over the dark blue sky, tiny bright fires seemed whisking through the finest, almost black dust. Everything was still; and there was something hopeless and oppressive in this profound hush of exhausted nature. I made my way to a hay-loft, and lay down on the fresh-cut, but already almost dry grass. For a long while I could not go to sleep; for a long while Yakov's irresistible voice was ringing in my ears. . . . At last the heat and fatigue regained their sway, however, and I fell into a dead sleep. When I waked up, everything was in darkness; the hay scattered around smelt strong and was slightly damp; through the slender rafters of the half-open roof pale stars were faintly

twinkling. I went out. The glow of sunset had long died away, and its last trace showed in a faint light on the horizon; but above the freshness of the night there was still a feeling of heat in the atmosphere, lately baked through by the sun, and the breast still craved for a draught of cool air. There was no wind, nor were there any clouds; the sky all round was clear, and transparently dark, softly glimmering with innumerable, but scarcely visible stars. There were lights twinkling about the village; from the flaring tavern close by rose a confused, discordant din, amid which I fancied I recognised the voice of Yakov. Violent laughter came from there in an outburst at times. I went up to the little window and pressed my face against the pane. I saw a cheerless, though varied and animated scene; all were drunk—all from Yakov upwards. With breast bared, he sat on a bench, and singing in a thick voice a street song to a dance-tune, he lazily fingered and strummed on the strings of a guitar. His moist hair hung in tufts over his fearfully pale face. In the middle of the room, the Gabbler, completely 'screwed' and without his coat, was hopping about in a dance before the peasant in the grey smock; the peasant, on his side, was with difficulty stamping and scraping with his feet, and grinning meaninglessly over his dishevelled beard; he waved one hand from time to time, as much as to say, 'Here goes!' Nothing could be more ludicrous than his face; however much he twitched up his eyebrows,

his heavy lids would hardly rise, but seemed lying upon his scarcely visible, dim, and mawkish eyes. He was in that amiable frame of mind of a perfectly intoxicated man, when every passer-by, directly he looks him in the face, is sure to say, 'Bless you, brother, bless you!' The Blinkard, as red as a lobster, and his nostrils dilated wide, was laughing malignantly in a corner; only Nikolai Ivanitch, as befits a good tavern-keeper, preserved his composure unchanged. The room was thronged with many new faces; but the Wild Master I did not see in it.

I turned away with rapid steps and began descending the hill on which Kolotovka lies. At the foot of this hill stretches a wide plain; plunged in the misty waves of the evening haze, it seemed more immense, and was, as it were, merged in the darkening sky. I walked with long strides along the road by the ravine, when all at once from somewhere far away in the plain came a boy's clear voice: 'Antropka! Antropka-a-a!...' He shouted in obstinate and tearful desperation, with long, long drawing out of the last syllable.

He was silent for a few instants, and started shouting again. His voice rang out clear in the still, lightly slumbering air. Thirty times at least he had called the name, Antropka. When suddenly, from the farthest end of the plain, as though from another world, there floated a scarcely audible reply:

'Wha-a-t?'

The boy's voice shouted back at once with gleeful exasperation :

'Come here, devil! woo-od imp!'

'What fo-or?' replied the other, after a long interval.

'Because dad wants to thrash you!' the first voice shouted back hurriedly.

The second voice did not call back again, and the boy fell to shouting Antropka once more. His cries, fainter and less and less frequent, still floated up to my ears, when it had grown completely dark, and I had turned the corner of the wood which skirts my village and lies over three miles from Kolotovka. . . 'Antropka-a-a!' was still audible in the air, filled with the shadows of night.

XVIII

PIOTR PETROVITCH KARATAEV

ONE autumn five years ago, I chanced, when on the road from Moscow to Tula, to spend almost a whole day at a posting station for want of horses. I was on the way back from a shooting expedition, and had been so incautious as to send my three horses on in front of me. The man in charge of the station, a surly, elderly man, with hair hanging over his brows to his very nose, with little sleepy eyes, answered all my complaints and requests with disconnected grumbling, slammed the door angrily, as though he were cursing his calling in life, and going out on the steps abused the postilions who were sauntering in a leisurely way through the mud with the weighty wooden yokes on their arms, or sat yawning and scratching themselves on a bench, and paid no special attention to the wrathful exclamations of their superior. I had already sat myself down three times to tea, had several times tried in vain to sleep, and had read all the inscriptions on the walls and windows; I was overpowered by fearful boredom. In chill and

helpless despair I was staring at the upturned shafts of my carriage, when suddenly I heard the tinkling of a bell, and a small trap, drawn by three jaded horses, drew up at the steps. The new arrival leaped out of the trap, and shouting 'Horses! and look sharp!' he went into the room. While he was listening with the strange wonder customary in such cases to the overseer's answer that there were no horses, I had time to scan my new companion from top to toe with all the greedy curiosity of a man bored to death. He appeared to be nearly thirty. Small-pox had left indelible traces on his face, which was dry and yellowish, with an unpleasant coppery tinge; his long blue-black hair fell in ringlets on his collar behind, and was twisted into jaunty curls in front; his small swollen eyes were quite expressionless; a few hairs sprouted on his upper lip. He was dressed like a dissipated country gentleman, given to frequenting horse-fairs, in a rather greasy striped Caucasian jacket, a faded lilac silk-tie, a waistcoat with copper buttons, and grey trousers shaped like huge funnels, from under which the toes of unbrushed shoes could just be discerned. He smelt strongly of tobacco and spirits; on his fat, red hands, almost hidden in his sleeves, could be seen silver and Tula rings. Such figures are met in Russia not by dozens, but by hundreds; an acquaintance with them is not, to tell the truth, productive of any particular pleasure; but in spite of the prejudice

with which I looked at the new-comer, I could not fail to notice the recklessly good-natured and passionate expression of his face.

'This gentleman's been waiting more than an hour here too,' observed the overseer indicating me.

More than an hour! The rascal was making fun of me.

'But perhaps he doesn't need them as I do,' answered the new comer.

'I know nothing about that,' said the overseer sulkily.

'Then is it really impossible? Are there positively no horses?'

'Impossible. There's not a single horse.'

'Well, tell them to bring me a samovar. I'll wait a little; there's nothing else to be done.'

The new comer sat down on the bench, flung his cap on the table, and passed his hand over his hair.

'Have you had tea already?' he inquired of me.

'Yes.'

'But won't you have a little more for company.'

I consented. The stout red samovar made its appearance for the fourth time on the table. I brought out a bottle of rum. I was not wrong in taking my new acquaintance for a country gentleman of small property. His name was Piotr Petrovitch Karataev.

We got into conversation. In less than half-an-

hour after his arrival, he was telling me his whole life with the most simple-hearted openness.

'I'm on my way to Moscow now,' he told me as he sipped his fourth glass; 'there's nothing for me to do now in the country.'

'How so?'

'Well, it's come to that. My property's in disorder; I've ruined my peasants, I must confess; there have been bad years: bad harvests, and all sorts of ill-luck, you know. . . . Though, indeed,' he added, looking away dejectedly; 'how could I manage an estate!'

'Why's that?'

'But, no,' he interrupted me? 'there are people like me who make good managers! You see,' he went on, screwing his head on one side and sucking his pipe assiduously, 'looking at me, I dare say you think I'm not much . . . but you see, I must confess, I've had a very middling education; I wasn't well off. I beg your pardon; I'm an open man, and if you come to that. . . .'

He did not complete his sentence, but broke off with a wave of the hand. I began to assure him that he was mistaken, that I was highly delighted to meet him, and so on, and then observed that I should have thought a very thorough education was not indispensable for the good management of property.

'Agreed,' he responded; 'I agree with you. But still, a special sort of disposition's essential! There are some may do anything they like, and

it's all right! but I. . . . Allow me to ask, are you from Petersburg or from Moscow?'

'I 'm from Petersburg.'

He blew a long coil of smoke from his nostrils.

'And I 'm going in to Moscow to be an official.'

'What department do you mean to enter?'

'I don't know; that 's as it happens. I 'll own to you, I 'm afraid of official life; one 's under responsibility at once. I 've always lived in the country; I'm used to it, you know . . . but now, there 's no help for it . . . it 's through poverty! Oh, poverty, how I hate it!'

'But then you will be living in the capital.'

'In the capital. . . . Well, I don't know what there is that 's pleasant in the capital. We shall see; may be, it 's pleasant too. . . . Though nothing, I fancy, could be better than the country.'

'Then is it really impossible for you to live at your country place?'

He gave a sigh.

'Quite impossible. It 's, so to say, not my own now.'

'Why, how so?'

'Well, a good fellow there—a neighbour—is in possession . . . a bill of exchange.'

Poor Piotr Petrovitch passed his hand over his face, thought a minute, and shook his head.

'Well?' . . . I must own, though,' he added after a brief silence, 'I can't blame anybody; it 's my own fault. I was fond of cutting a dash, I am fond of cutting a dash, damn my soul!'

'You had a jolly life in the country?' I asked him.

'I had, sir,' he responded emphatically, looking me straight in the face, 'twelve harriers—harriers, I can tell you, such as you don't very often see.' (The last words he uttered in a drawl with great significance.) 'A grey hare they'd double upon in no time. After the red fox—they were devils, regular serpents. And I could boast of my greyhounds too. It's all a thing of the past now, I've no reason to lie. I used to go out shooting too. I had a dog called the Countess, a wonderful setter, with a first-rate scent—she took everything. Sometimes I'd go to a marsh and call "Seek." If she refused, you might go with a dozen dogs, and you'd find nothing. But when she was after anything, it was a sight to see her. And in the house so well-bred. If you gave her bread with your left hand and said, "A Jew's tasted it," she wouldn't touch it; but give it with your right and say, "The young lady's had some," and she'd take it and eat it at once. I had a pup of hers—a capital pup he was, and I meant to bring him with me to Moscow, but a friend asked me for him, together with a gun; he said, "In Moscow you'll have other things to think of." I gave him the pup and the gun; and so, you know, it stayed there.'

'But you might go shooting in Moscow.'

'No, what would be the use? I didn't know when to pull myself up, so now I must grin and bear it.

But there, kindly tell me rather about the living in Moscow—is it dear?'

'No, not very.'

'Not very. . . . And tell me, please, are there any gypsies in Moscow?'

'What sort of gypsies?'

'Why, such as hang about fairs?'

'Yes, there are in Moscow. . . .'

'Well, that's good news. I like gypsies, damn my soul! I like 'em. . . .'

And there was a gleam of reckless merriment in Piotr Petrovitch's eyes. But suddenly he turned round on the bench, then seemed to ponder, dropped his eyes, and held out his empty glass to me.

'Give me some of your rum,' he said.'

'But the tea's all finished.'

'Never mind, as it is, without tea . . . Ah—h!'

Karataev laid his head in his hands and leaned his elbows on the table. I looked at him without speaking, and although I was expecting the sentimental exclamations, possibly even the tears of which the inebriate are so lavish, yet when he raised his head, I was, I must own, impressed by the profoundly mournful expression of his face.

'What's wrong with you?'

'Nothing. . . . I was thinking of old times. An anecdote that . . . I would tell it you, but I am ashamed to trouble you. . . .'

'What nonsense!'

'Yes,' he went on with a sigh:—'there are cases

. . . like mine, for instance. Well, if you like, I will tell you. Though really I don't know. . . .'

'Do tell me, dear Piotr Petrovitch.'

'Very well, though it's a . . . Well, do you see,' he began; 'but, upon my word, I don't know.'

'Come, that's enough, dear Piotr Petrovitch.'

'All right. This, then, was what befel me, so to say. I used to live in the country . . . All of a sudden, I took a fancy to a girl. Ah, what a girl she was! . . . handsome, clever, and so good and sweet! Her name was Matrona. But she wasn't a lady—that is, you understand, she was a serf, simply a serf-girl. And not my girl; she belonged to someone else—that was the trouble. Well, so I loved her—it's really an incident that one can hardly . . . well, and she loved me, too. And so Matrona began begging me to buy her off from her mistress; and, indeed, the thought had crossed my mind too. . . . But her mistress was a rich, dreadful old body; she lived about twelve miles from me. Well, so one fine day, as the saying is, I ordered my team of three horses to be harnessed abreast to the droshky—in the centre I'd a first-rate goer, an extraordinary Asiatic horse, for that reason called Lampurdos—I dressed myself in my best, and went off to Matrona's mistress. I arrived; it was a big house with wings and a garden. . . . Matrona was waiting for me at the bend of the road; she tried to say a word to me, but she could only kiss her hand and turn away. Well, so I went into the hall and asked if

the mistress were at home? . . . And a tall footman says to me: "What name shall I say?" I answered, "Say, brother, Squire Karataev has called on a matter of business." The footman walked away; I waited by myself and thought, "I wonder how it'll be? I daresay the old beast'll screw out a fearful price, for all she's so rich. Five hundred roubles she'll ask, I shouldn't be surprised." Well, at last the footman returned, saying, "If you please, walk up." I followed him into the drawing-room. A little yellowish old woman sat in an armchair blinking. "What do you want?" To begin with, you know, I thought it necessary to say how glad I was to make her acquaintance. . . . "You are making a mistake; I am not the mistress here; I'm a relation of hers. . . . What do you want?" I remarked upon that, "I had to speak to the mistress herself." "Marya Ilyinishna is not receiving to-day; she is unwell. . . . What do you want?" There's nothing for it, I thought to myself; so I explained my position to her. The old lady heard me out. "Matrona! what Matrona?"

'"Matrona Fedorovna, Kulik's daughter."

'"Fedor Kulik's daughter. . . . But how did you come to know her?" "By chance." "And is she aware of your intention?" "Yes." The old lady was silent for a minute. Then, "Ah, I'll let her know it, the worthless hussy!" she said. I was astounded, I must confess. "What ever for? upon my word! . . . I'm ready to

pay a good sum, if you will be so good as to name it."'

'The old hag positively hissed at me. "A surprising idea you've concocted there; as though we needed your money! . . . I'll teach her, I'll show her! . . . I'll beat the folly out of her!" The old lady choked with spitefulness. "Wasn't she well off with us, pray? . . . Ah, she's a little devil! God forgive my transgressions!" I fired up, I'll confess. "What are you threatening the poor girl for? How is she to blame?" The old lady crossed herself. "Ah, Lord have mercy on me, do you suppose I'd . . ." "But she's not yours, you know!" "Well, Marya Ilyinishna knows best about that; it's not your business, my good sir; but I'll show that chit of a Matrona whose serf she is." I'll confess, I almost fell on the damned old woman, but I thought of Matrona, and my hands dropped. I was more frightened than I can tell you; I began entreating the old lady. "Take what you like," I said. "But what use is she to you?" "I like her, good ma'am; put yourself in my position. . . . Allow me to kiss your little hand." And I positively kissed the wretch's hand! "Well," mumbled the old witch, "I'll tell Marya Ilyinishna—it's for her to decide; you come back in a couple of days." I went home in great uneasiness. I began to suspect that I'd managed the thing badly; that I'd been wrong in letting her notice my state of mind, but I thought of that too late. Two days after, I went to see the mis-

tress. I was shown into a boudoir. There were heaps of flowers and splendid furniture; the lady herself was sitting in a wonderful easy-chair, with her head lolling back on a cushion; and the same relation was sitting there too, and some young lady, with white eyebrows and a mouth all awry, in a green gown—a companion, most likely. The old lady said through her nose, "Please be seated." I sat down. She began questioning me as to how old I was, and where I 'd been in the service, and what I meant to do, and all that very condescendingly and solemnly. I answered minutely. The old lady took a handkerchief off the table, flourished it, fanning herself. . . . "Katerina Karpovna informed me," says she, "of your scheme; she informed me of it; but I make it my rule," says she, "not to allow my people to leave my service. It is improper, and quite unsuitable in a well-ordered house; it is not good order. I have already given my orders," says she. "There will be no need for you to trouble yourself further," says she. "Oh, no trouble, really. . . But can it be, Matrona Fedorovna is so necessary to you?" "No," says she, "she is not necessary." "Then why won't you part with her to me?" "Because I don't choose to; I don't choose—and that 's all about it. I 've already," says she, "given my orders: she is being sent to a village in the steppes." I was thunderstruck. The old lady said a couple of words in French to the young lady in green; she went out. "I am," says she,

"a woman of strict principles, and my health is delicate; I can't stand being worried. You are still young, and I'm an old woman, and entitled to give you advice. Wouldn't it be better for you to settle down, get married; to look out a good match; wealthy brides are few, but a poor girl, of the highest moral character, could be found." I stared, do you know, at the old lady, and didn't understand what she was driving at; I could hear she was talking about marriage, but the village in the steppes was ringing in my ears all the while. Get married! . . . what the devil! . . .'

Here he suddenly stopped in his story and looked at me.

'You're not married, I suppose?'

'No.'

'There, of course, I could see it. I couldn't stand it. "But, upon my word, ma'am, what on earth are you talking about? How does marriage come in? I simply want to know from you whether you will part with your serf-girl Matrona or not?" The old lady began sighing and groaning. "Ah, he's worrying me! ah, send him away! ah!" The relation flew to her, and began scolding me, while the lady kept on moaning: "What have I done to deserve it? . . . I suppose I'm not mistress in my own house? Ah! ah!" I snatched my hat, and ran out of the house like a madman.

'Perhaps,' he continued, 'you will blame me for being so warmly attached to a girl of low position;

I don't mean to justify myself exactly, either . . . but so it came to pass! . . . Would you believe it, I had no rest by day or by night. . . . I was in torment! Besides, I thought, "I have ruined the poor girl!" At times I thought that she was herding geese in a smock, and being ill-treated by her mistress's orders, and the bailiff, a peasant in tarred boots, reviling her with foul abuse. I positively fell into a cold sweat. Well, I could not stand it. I found out what village she had been sent to, mounted my horse, and set off. I only got there the evening of the next day. Evidently they hadn't expected such a proceeding on my part, and had given no order in regard to me. I went straight to the bailiff as though I were a neighbour; I go into the yard and look around; there was Matrona sitting on the steps leaning on her elbow. She was on the point of crying out, but I held up my finger and pointed outside, towards the open country. I went into the hut; I chatted away a bit to the bailiff, told him ten thousand lies, seized the right moment, and went out to Matrona. She, poor girl, fairly hung round my neck. She was pale and thin, my poor darling! I kept saying to her, do you know: "There, it's all right, Matrona; it's all right, don't cry," and my own tears simply flowed and flowed. . . . Well, at last though, I was ashamed, I said to her: "Matrona, tears are no help in trouble, but we must act, as they say, resolutely; you must run away with me; that's how we must act." Matrona

fairly swooned away. . . . "How can it be! I shall be ruined; they will be the death of me altogether." "You silly! who will find you?" "They will find me; they will be sure to find me. Thank you, Piotr Petrovitch—I shall never forget your kindness; but now you must leave me; such is my fate, it seems." "Ah, Matrona, Matrona, I thought you were a girl of character!" And, indeed, she had a great deal of character. . . . She had a heart, a heart of gold! "Why should you be left here? It makes no difference; things can't be worse. Come, tell me—you've felt the bailiff's fists, eh?" Matrona fairly crimsoned, and her lips trembled. "But there'll be no living for my family on my account." "Why, your family now—will they send them for soldiers?" "Yes; they'll send my brother for a soldier." "And your father?" "Oh, they won't send father; he's the only good tailor among us."

'"There, you see; and it won't kill your brother." Would you believe it, I'd hard work to persuade her; she even brought forward a notion that I might have to answer for it. "But that's not your affair," said I. . . . However, I did carry her off . . . not that time, but another; one night I came with a light cart, and carried her off.'

'You carried her off?'

'Yes . . . Well, so she lived in my house. It was a little house, and I'd few servants. My people, I will tell you frankly, respected me; they wouldn't have betrayed me for any reward.

I began to be as happy as a prince. Matrona rested and recovered, and I grew devoted to her. . . . And what a girl she was! It seemed to come by nature! She could sing, and dance, and play the guitar! . . . I didn't show her to my neighbours; I was afraid they'd gossip! But there was one fellow, my bosom friend, Gornostaev, Panteley—you don't know him? He was simply crazy about her; he'd kiss her hand as though she were a lady; he would, really. And I must tell you, Gornostaev was not like me; he was a cultivated man, had read all Pushkin; sometimes, he'd talk to Matrona and me so that we pricked up our ears to listen. He taught her to write; such a queer chap he was! And how I dressed her—better than the governor's wife, really; I had a pelisse made her of crimson velvet, edged with fur . . . Ah! how that pelisse suited her! It was made by a Moscow madame in a new fashion, with a waist. And what a wonderful creature Matrona was! Sometimes she'd fall to musing, and sit for hours together looking at the ground, without stirring a muscle; and I'd sit too, and look at her, and could never gaze enough, just as if I were seeing her for the first time. . . . Then she would smile, and my heart would give a jump as though someone were tickling me. Or else she'd suddenly fall to laughing, joking, dancing; she would embrace me so warmly, so passionately, that my head went round. From morning to evening I thought of nothing but how I could

please her. And would you believe it? I gave her presents simply to see how pleased she would be, the darling! all blushing with delight! How she would try on my present; how she would come back with her new possession on, and kiss me! Her father, Kulik, got wind of it, somehow; the old man came to see us, and how he wept. . . . In that way we lived for five months, and I should have been glad to live with her for ever, but for my cursed ill-luck!'

Piotr Petrovitch stopped.

'What was it happened?' I asked him sympathetically.

He waved his hand.

'Everything went to the devil. I was the ruin of her too. My little Matrona was passionately fond of driving in sledges, and she used to drive herself; she used to put on her pelisse and her embroidered Torzhok gloves, and cry out with delight all the way. We used to go out sledging always in the evening, so as not to meet any one, you know. So, once it was such a splendid day, you know, frosty and clear, and no wind . . . we drove out. Matrona had the reins. I looked where she was driving. Could it be to Kukuyevka, her mistress's village? Yes, it was to Kukuyevka. I said to her, "You mad girl, where are you going?" She gave me a look over her shoulder and laughed. "Let me," she said, "for a lark." "Well," thought I, "come what may! . . ." To drive past her mistress's house was nice, wasn't

it? Tell me yourself—wasn't it nice? So we drove on. The shaft-horse seemed to float through the air, and the trace-horses went, I can tell you, like a regular whirlwind. We were already in sight of Kukuyevka; when suddenly I see an old green coach crawling along with a groom on the footboard up behind. . . . It was the mistress—the mistress driving towards us! My heart failed me; but Matrona—how she lashed the horses with the reins, and flew straight towards the coach! The coachman, he, you understand, sees us flying to meet him, meant, you know, to move on one side, turned too sharp, and upset the coach in a snowdrift. The window was broken; the mistress shrieked, "Ai! ai! ai! ai! ai! ai!" The companion wailed, "Help! help!" while we flew by at the best speed we might. We galloped on, but I thought, "Evil will come of it. I did wrong to let her drive to Kukuyevka." And what do you think? Why, the mistress had recognised Matrona, and me too, the old wretch, and made a complaint against me. "My runaway serf-girl," said she, "is living at Mr. Karataev's"; and thereupon she made a suitable present. Lo and behold! the captain of police comes to me; and he was a man I knew, Stepan Sergyeitch Kuzovkin, a good fellow; that's to say, really a regular bad lot. So he came up and said this and that, and "How could you do so, Piotr Petrovitch? . . . The liability is serious, and the laws very distinct on the subject." I tell him,

"Well, we'll have a talk about that, of course; but come, you'll take a little something after your drive." He agreed to take something, but he said, "Justice has claims, Piotr Petrovitch; think for yourself." "Justice, to be sure," said I, "of course . . but, I have heard say you've a little black horse. Would you be willing to exchange it for my Lampurdos? . . . But there's no girl called Matrona Fedorovna in my keeping." "Come," says he, "Piotr Petrovitch, the girl's with you, we're not living in Switzerland, you know . . . though my little horse might be exchanged for Lampurdos; I might, to be sure, accept it in that way." However, I managed to get rid of him somehow that time. But the old lady made a greater fuss than ever; ten thousand roubles, she said, she wouldn't grudge over the business. You see, when she saw me, she suddenly took an idea into her head to marry me to her young lady companion in green; that I found out later; that was why she was so spiteful. What ideas won't these great ladies take into their heads! . . . It comes through being dull, I suppose. Things went badly with me: I didn't spare money, and I kept Matrona in hiding. No, they harassed me, and turned me this way and that: I got into debt; I lost my health. . . . So one night, as I lay in my bed, thinking, "My God, why should I suffer so? What am I to do, since I can't get over loving her? . . . There, I can't, and that's all about it!" into the room walked Matrona. I had hidden her for

the time at a farmhouse a mile and a half from my house. I was frightened. "What? have they discovered you even there?" "No, Piotr Petrovitch," said she, "no one disturbs me at Bubnova; but will that last long? My heart," she said, "is torn, Piotr Petrovitch; I am sorry for you, my dear one; never shall I forget your goodness, Piotr Petrovitch, but now I 've come to say good-bye to you." "What do you mean, what do you mean, you mad girl? . . . Good-bye, how good-bye?" . . . "Yes . . . I am going to give myself up." "But I 'll lock you up in a garret, mad girl! . . . Do you mean to destroy me? Do you want to kill me, or what?" The girl was silent; she looked on the floor. "Come, speak, speak!" "I can't bear to cause you any more trouble, Piotr Petrovitch." Well, one might talk to her as one pleased . . . "But do you know, little fool, do you know, mad . . ."

And Piotr Petrovitch sobbed bitterly.

'Well, what do you think?' he went on, striking the table with his fist and trying to frown, while the tears still coursed down his flushed cheeks; 'the girl gave herself up. . . . She went and gave herself up . . .'

'The horses are ready,' the overseer cried triumphantly, entering the room.

We both stood up.

'What became of Matrona?' I asked.

Karataev waved his hand.

. . . . . .

A year after my meeting with Karataev, I

happened to go to Moscow. One day, before dinner, for some reason or other I went into a *café* in the Ohotny row—an original Moscow *café*. In the billiard-room, across clouds of smoke, I caught glimpses of flushed faces, whiskers, old-fashioned Hungarian coats, and new-fangled Slavonic costumes.

Thin little old men in sober surtouts were reading the Russian papers. The waiters flitted airily about with trays, treading softly on the green carpets. Merchants, with painful concentration, were drinking tea. Suddenly a man came out of the billiard-room, rather dishevelled, and not quite steady on his legs. He put his hands in his pockets, bent his head, and looked aimlessly about.

'Ba, ba, ba! Piotr Petrovitch! . . . How are you?'

Piotr Petrovitch almost fell on my neck, and, slightly staggering, drew me into a small private room.

'Come here,' he said, carefully seating me in an easy-chair; 'here you will be comfortable. Waiter, beer! No, I mean champagne! There, I'll confess, I didn't expect; I didn't expect . . . Have you been here long? Are you staying much longer? Well, God has brought us, as they say, together.'

'Yes, do you remember . . .'

'To be sure, I remember; to be sure, I remember!' he interrupted me hurriedly; 'it's a thing of the past . . .'

'Well, what are you doing here, my dear Piotr Petrovitch?'

'I'm living, as you can see. Life's first-rate here; they're a merry lot here. Here I've found peace.'

And he sighed, and raised his eyes towards heaven.

'Are you in the service?'

'No, I'm not in the service yet, but I think I shall enter. But what's the service? . . . People are the chief thing. What people I have got to know here! . . .'

A boy came in with a bottle of champagne on a black tray.

'There, and this is a good fellow. . . . Isn't that true, Vasya, that you're a good fellow? To your health!'

The boy stood a minute, shook his head, decorously smiled, and went out.

'Yes, there are capital people here,' pursued Piotr Petrovitch; 'people of soul, of feeling. . . . Would you like me to introduce you?—such jolly chaps. . . . They'll all be glad to know you. I say . . . Bobrov is dead; that's a sad thing.'

'What Bobrov?'

'Sergay Bobrov; he was a capital fellow; he took me under his wing as an ignoramus from the wilds. And Panteley Gornostaev is dead. All dead, all!'

'Have you been living all the time in Moscow? You haven't been away to the country?'

'To the country! . . . My country place is sold.'

'Sold?'

'By auction. . . . There! what a pity you didn't buy it.'

'What are you going to live on, Piotr Petrovitch?'

'I shan't die of hunger; God will provide when I've no money. I shall have friends. And what is money. . . . Dust and ashes! Gold is dust!'

He shut his eyes, felt in his pocket, and held out to me in the palm of his hand two sixpences and a penny.

'What's that? Isn't it dust and ashes' (and the money flew on the floor). 'But you had better tell me, have you read Polezhaev?'

'Yes.'

'Have you seen Motchalov in Hamlet?'

'No, I haven't.'

'You've not seen him, not seen him! . . .' (And Karataev's face turned pale; his eyes strayed uneasily; he turned away; a faint spasm passed over his lips.) 'Ah, Motchalov, Motchalov! "To die—to sleep!"' he said in a thick voice:

> 'No more; and by a sleep to say we end
> The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
> That flesh is heir to; 'tis a consummation
> Devoutly to be wished. To die—to sleep!'

'To sleep—to sleep,' he muttered several times.

'Tell me, please,' I began; but he went on with fire:

'Who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The insolence of office and the spurns
That patient merit of the unworthy takes
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin? Nymph in thy orisons
Be all my sins remembered.'

And he dropped his head on the table. He began stammering and talking at random. 'Within a month'! he delivered with fresh fire:

'A little month, or ere those shoes were old,
With which she followed my poor father's body,
Like Niobe—all tears; why she, even she—
O God! a beast, that wants discourse of reason,
Would have mourned longer!'

He raised a glass of champagne to his lips, but did not drink off the wine, and went on:

'For Hecuba!
What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
That he should weep for her? . . .
But I'm a dull and muddy mettled-rascal,
Who calls me coward? gives me the lie i' the throat?
. . Why I should take it; for it cannot be,
But I am pigeon-livered and lack gall
To make oppression bitter.'

Karataev put down the glass and grabbed at his head. I fancied I understood him.

'Well, well,' he said at last, 'one must not rake

up the past. Isn't that so?' (and he laughed). 'To your health!'

'Shall you stay in Moscow?' I asked him.

'I shall die in Moscow!'

'Karataev!' called a voice in the next room; 'Karataev, where are you? Come here, my dear fellow!'

'They're calling me,' he said, getting up heavily from his seat. 'Good-bye; come and see me if you can; I live in * * *'

But next day, through unforeseen circumstances, I was obliged to leave Moscow, and I never saw Piotr Petrovitch Karataev again.

XIX

THE TRYST

I WAS sitting in a birchwood in autumn, about the middle of September. From early morning a fine rain had been falling, with intervals from time to time of warm sunshine ; the weather was unsettled. The sky was at one time overcast with soft white clouds, at another it suddenly cleared in parts for an instant, and then behind the parting clouds could be seen a blue, bright and tender as a beautiful eye. I sat looking about and listening. The leaves faintly rustled over my head ; from the sound of them alone one could tell what time of year it was. It was not the gay laughing tremor of the spring, nor the subdued whispering, the prolonged gossip of the summer, nor the chill and timid faltering of late autumn, but a scarcely audible, drowsy chatter. A slight breeze was faintly humming in the tree-tops. Wet with the rain, the copse in its inmost recesses was for ever changing as the sun shone or hid behind a cloud ; at one moment it was all a radiance, as though suddenly everything were smiling in it ; the slender

stems of the thinly-growing birch-trees took all at once the soft lustre of white silk, the tiny leaves lying on the earth were on a sudden flecked and flaring with purplish gold, and the graceful stalks of the high, curly bracken, decked already in their autumn colour, the hue of an over-ripe grape, seemed interlacing in endless tangling crisscross before one's eyes ; then suddenly again everything around was faintly bluish ; the glaring tints died away instantaneously, the birch-trees stood all white and lustreless, white as fresh-fallen snow, before the cold rays of the winter sun have caressed it ; and slily, stealthily there began drizzling and whispering through the wood the finest rain. The leaves on the birches were still almost all green, though perceptibly paler ; only here and there stood one young leaf, all red or golden, and it was a sight to see how it flamed in the sunshine when the sunbeams suddenly pierced with tangled flecks of light through the thick network of delicate twigs, freshly washed by the sparkling rain. Not one bird could be heard ; all were in hiding and silent, except that at times there rang out the metallic, bell-like sound of the jeering tomtit. Before halting in this birch copse I had been through a wood of tall aspen-trees with my dog. I confess I have no great liking for that tree, the aspen, with its pale-lilac trunk and the greyish-green metallic leaves which it flings high as it can, and unfolds in a quivering fan in the air ; I do not care for the eternal shaking of its round, slovenly

leaves, awkwardly hooked on to long stalks. It is only fine on some summer evenings when, rising singly above low undergrowth, it faces the reddening beams of the setting sun, and shines and quivers, bathed from root to top in one unbroken yellow glow, or when, on a clear windy day, it is all rippling, rustling, and whispering to the blue sky, and every leaf is, as it were, taken by a longing to break away, to fly off and soar into the distance. But, as a rule, I don't care for the tree, and so, not stopping to rest in the aspen wood, I made my way to the birch-copse, nestled down under one tree whose branches started low down near the ground, and were consequently capable of shielding me from the rain, and after admiring the surrounding view a little, I fell into that sweet untroubled sleep only known to sportsmen.

I cannot say how long I was asleep, but when I opened my eyes, all the depths of the wood were filled with sunlight, and in all directions across the joyously rustling leaves there were glimpses and, as it were, flashes of intense blue sky ; the clouds had vanished, driven away by the blustering wind ; the weather had changed to fair, and there was that feeling of peculiar dry freshness in the air which fills the heart with a sense of boldness, and is almost always a sure sign of a still bright evening after a rainy day. I was just about to get up and try my luck again when suddenly my eyes fell on a motionless human figure. I looked attentively ; it was a young peasant girl. She was

sitting twenty paces off, her head bent in thought, and her hands lying in her lap; one of them, half-open, held a big nosegay of wild flowers, which softly stirred on her checked petticoat with every breath. Her clean white smock, buttoned up at the throat and wrists, lay in short soft folds about her figure; two rows of big yellow beads fell from her neck to her bosom. She was very pretty. Her thick fair hair of a lovely, almost ashen hue, was parted into two carefully combed semicircles, under the narrow crimson fillet, which was brought down almost on to her forehead, white as ivory; the rest of her face was faintly tanned that golden hue which is only taken by a delicate skin. I could not see her eyes—she did not raise them; but I saw her delicate high eye-brows, her long lashes; they were wet, and on one of her cheeks there shone in the sun the traces of quickly drying tears, reaching right down to her rather pale lips. Her little head was very charming altogether; even her rather thick and snub nose did not spoil her. I was especially taken with the expression of her face; it was so simple and gentle, so sad and so full of childish wonder at its own sadness. She was obviously waiting for some one; something made a faint crackling in the wood; she raised her head at once, and looked round; in the transparent shade I caught a rapid glimpse of her eyes, large, clear, and timorous, like a fawn's. For a few instants she listened, not moving her wide open eyes from the spot whence the faint sound

had come ; she sighed, turned her head slowly, bent still lower, and began sorting her flowers. Her eyelids turned red, her lips twitched faintly, and a fresh tear rolled from under her thick eyelashes, and stood brightly shining on her cheek. Rather a long while passed thus ; the poor girl did not stir, except for a despairing movement of her hands now and then—and she kept listening, listening. . . . Again there was a crackling sound in the wood: she started. The sound did not cease, grew more distinct, and came closer ; at last one could hear quick resolute footsteps. She drew herself up and seemed frightened ; her intent gaze was all aquiver, all aglow with expectation. Through the thicket quickly appeared the figure of a man. She gazed at it, suddenly flushed, gave a radiant, blissful smile, tried to rise, and sank back again at once, turned white and confused, and only raised her quivering, almost supplicating eyes to the man approaching, when the latter stood still beside her.

I looked at him with curiosity from my ambush. I confess he did not make an agreeable impression on me. He was, to judge by external signs, the pampered valet of some rich young gentleman. His attire betrayed pretensions to style and fashionable carelessness ; he wore a shortish coat of a bronze colour, doubtless from his master's wardrobe, buttoned up to the top, a pink cravat with lilac ends, and a black velvet cap with a gold ribbon, pulled forward right on to his eyebrows.

The round collar of his white shirt mercilessly propped up his ears and cut his cheeks, and his starched cuffs hid his whole hand to the red crooked fingers, adorned by gold and silver rings, with turquoise forget-me-nots. His red, fresh, impudent-looking face belonged to the order of faces which, as far as I have observed, are almost always repulsive to men, and unfortunately are very often attractive to women. He was obviously trying to give a scornful and bored expression to his coarse features; he was incessantly screwing up his milky grey eyes—small enough at all times; he scowled, dropped the corners of his mouth, affected to yawn, and with careless, though not perfectly natural nonchalance, pushed back his modishly curled red locks, or pinched the yellow hairs sprouting on his thick upper lip—in fact, he gave himself insufferable airs. He began his antics directly he caught sight of the young peasant girl waiting for him; slowly, with a swaggering step, he went up to her, stood a moment shrugging his shoulders, stuffed both hands in his coat pockets, and barely vouchsafing the poor girl a cursory and indifferent glance, he dropped on to the ground.

'Well,' he began, still gazing away, swinging his leg and yawning, 'have you been here long?'

The girl could not at once answer.

'Yes, a long while, Viktor Alexandritch,' she said at last, in a voice hardly audible.

'Ah!' (He took off his cap, majestically passed

his hand over his thick, stiffly curled hair, which grew almost down to his eyebrows, and looking round him with dignity, he carelessly covered his precious head again.) 'And I quite forgot all about it. Besides, it rained!' (He yawned again.) 'Lots to do; there's no looking after everything; and he's always scolding. We set off to-morrow. . . .'

'To-morrow?' uttered the young girl. And she fastened her startled eyes upon him.

'Yes, to-morrow. . . . Come, come, come, please!' he added, in a tone of vexation, seeing she was shaking all over and softly bending her head; 'please, Akulina, don't cry. You know, I can't stand that.' (And he wrinkled up his snub nose.) 'Else I'll go away at once. . . . What silliness—snivelling!'

'There, I won't, I won't!' cried Akulina, hurriedly gulping down her tears with an effort. 'You are starting to-morrow?' she added, after a brief silence: 'when will God grant that we see each other again, Viktor Alexandritch?'

'We shall see each other, we shall see each other. If not next year—then later. The master wants to enter the service in Petersburg, I fancy,' he went on, pronouncing his words with careless condescension through his nose; 'and perhaps we shall go abroad too.'

'You will forget me, Viktor Alexandritch,' said Akulina mournfully.

'No, why so? I won't forget you; only you be sensible, don't be a fool; obey your father. . . .

And I won't forget you—no-o.' (And he placidly stretched and yawned again.)

'Don't forget me, Viktor Alexandritch,' she went on in a supplicating voice. 'I think none could love you as I do. I have given you everything. . . . You tell me to obey my father, Viktor Alexandritch. . . . But how can I obey my father? . . .'

'Why not?' (He uttered these words, as it were, from his stomach, lying on his back with his hands behind his head.)

'But how can I, Viktor Alexandritch?—you know yourself . . .'

She broke off. Viktor played with his steel watch-chain.

'You're not a fool, Akulina,' he said at last, 'so don't talk nonsense. I desire your good—do you understand me? To be sure, you're not a fool—not altogether a mere rustic, so to say; and your mother, too, wasn't always a peasant. Still you've no education—so you ought to do what you're told.'

'But it's fearful, Viktor Alexandritch.'

'O-oh! that's nonsense, my dear; a queer thing to be afraid of! What have you got there?' he added, moving closer to her; 'flowers?'

'Yes,' Akulina responded dejectedly. 'That's some wild tansy I picked,' she went on, brightening up a little; 'it's good for calves. And this is bud-marigold — against the king's evil. Look, what an exquisite flower! I've never seen such a

lovely flower before. These are forget-me-nots, and that's mother-darling. . . . And these I picked for you,' she added, taking from under a yellow tansy a small bunch of blue corn-flowers, tied up with a thin blade of grass. 'Do you like them?'

Viktor languidly held out his hand, took the flowers, carelessly sniffed at them, and began twirling them in his fingers, looking upwards. Akulina watched him. . . . In her mournful eyes there was such tender devotion, adoring submission and love. She was afraid of him, and did not dare to cry, and was saying good-bye to him and admiring him for the last time; while he lay, lolling like a sultan, and with magnanimous patience and condescension put up with her adoration. I must own, I glared indignantly at his red face, on which, under the affectation of scornful indifference, one could discern vanity soothed and satisfied. Akulina was so sweet at that instant; her whole soul was confidingly and passionately laid bare before him, full of longing and caressing tenderness, while he . . . he dropped the corn-flowers on the grass, pulled out of the side pocket of his coat a round eye-glass set in a brass rim, and began sticking it in his eye; but however much he tried to hold it with his frowning eyebrow, his pursed-up cheek and nose, the eye-glass kept tumbling out and falling into his hand.

'What is it?' Akulina asked at last in wonder.

'An eye-glass,' he answered with dignity.

'What for?'

'Why, to see better.'

'Show me.'

Viktor scowled, but gave her the glass.

'Don't break it; look out.'

'No fear, I won't break it.' (She put it to her eye.) 'I see nothing,' she said innocently.

'But you must shut your eye,' he retorted in the tones of a displeased teacher. (She shut the eye before which she held the glass.)

'Not that one, not that one, you fool! the other!' cried Viktor, and he took away his eye-glass, without allowing her to correct her mistake.

Akulina flushed a little, gave a faint laugh, and turned away.

'It's clear it's not for the likes of us,' she said.

'I should think not, indeed!'

The poor girl was silent and gave a deep sigh.

'Ah, Viktor Alexandritch, what it will be like for me to be without you!' she said suddenly.

Victor rubbed the glass on the lappet of his coat and put it back in his pocket.

'Yes, yes,' he said at last, 'at first it will be hard for you, certainly.' (He patted her condescendingly on the shoulder; she softly took his hand from her shoulder and timidly kissed it.) 'There, there, you're a good girl, certainly,' he went on, with a complacent smile; 'but what's to be done? You can see for yourself! me and the master could never stay on here; it will soon be winter now, and winter in the country—you know

yourself—is simply disgusting. It 's quite another thing in Petersburg! There there are simply such wonders as a silly girl like you could never fancy in your dreams! Such horses and streets, and society, and civilisation—simply marvellous! . . .' (Akulina listened with devouring attention, her lips slightly parted, like a child.) 'But what 's the use,' he added, turning over on the ground, 'of my telling you all this? Of course, you can't understand it!'

'Why so, Viktor Alexandritch! I understand; I understood everything.'

'My eye, what a girl it is!'

Akulina looked down.

'You used not to talk to me like that once, Viktor Alexandritch,' she said, not lifting her eyes.

'Once? . . . once! . . . My goodness!' he remarked, as though in indignation.

They both were silent.

'It 's time I was going,' said Viktor, and he was already rising on to his elbow.

'Wait a little longer,' Akulina besought him in a supplicating voice.

'What for? . . . Why, I 've said good-bye to you.'

'Wait a little,' repeated Akulina.

Viktor lay down again and began whistling. Akulina never took her eyes off him. I could see that she was gradually being overcome by emotion; her lips twitched, her pale cheeks faintly glowed.

'Viktor Alexandritch,' she began at last in a broken voice, 'it's too bad of you . . . it is too bad of you, Viktor Alexandritch, indeed it is!'

'What's too bad?' he asked frowning, and he slightly raised his head and turned it towards her.

'It's too bad, Viktor Alexandritch. You might at least say one kind word to me at parting; you might have said one little word to me, a poor luckless forlorn.' . . .

'But what am I to say to you?'

'I don't know; you know that best, Viktor Alexandritch. Here you are going away, and one little word. . . . What have I done to deserve it?'

'You're such a queer creature! What can I do?'

'One word at least.'

'There, she keeps on at the same thing,' he commented with annoyance, and he got up.

'Don't be angry, Viktor Alexandritch,' she added hurriedly, with difficulty suppressing her tears.

'I'm not angry, only you're silly. . . . What do you want? You know I can't marry you, can I? I can't, can I? What is it you want then, eh?' (He thrust his face forward as though expecting an answer, and spread his fingers out.)

'I want nothing . . . nothing,' she answered falteringly, and she ventured to hold out her trembling hands to him; 'but only a word at parting.'

And her tears fell in a torrent.

'There, that means she's gone off into crying,'

said Viktor coolly, pushing down his cap on to his eyes.

'I want nothing,' she went on, sobbing and covering her face with her hands; 'but what is there before me in my family? what is there before me? what will happen to me? what will become of me, poor wretch? They will marry me to a hateful . . . poor forsaken . . . Poor me!'

'Sing away, sing away,' muttered Viktor in an undertone, fidgeting with impatience as he stood.

'And he might say one word, one word. . . . He might say, "Akulina . . . I . . ."'

Sudden heart-breaking sobs prevented her from finishing; she lay with her face in the grass and bitterly, bitterly she wept. . . . Her whole body shook convulsively, her neck fairly heaved. . . . Her long-suppressed grief broke out in a torrent at last. Viktor stood over her, stood a moment, shrugged his shoulders, turned away and strode off.

A few instants passed . . . she grew calmer, raised her head, jumped up, looked round and wrung her hands; she tried to run after him, but her legs gave way under her—she fell on her knees. . . . I could not refrain from rushing up to her; but, almost before she had time to look at me, making a superhuman effort she got up with a faint shriek and vanished behind the trees, leaving her flowers scattered on the ground.

I stood a minute, picked up the bunch of corn-flowers, and went out of the wood into the open

country. The sun had sunk low in the pale clear sky; its rays too seemed to have grown pale and chill; they did not shine; they were diffused in an unbroken, watery light. It was within half-an-hour of sunset, but there was scarcely any of the glow of evening. A gusty wind scurried to meet me across the yellow parched stubble; little curled-up leaves, scudding hurriedly before it, flew by across the road, along the edge of the copse; the side of the copse facing the fields like a wall, was all shaking and lighted up by tiny gleams, distinct, but not glowing; on the reddish plants, the blades of grass, the straws on all sides, were sparkling and stirring innumerable threads of autumn spider-webs. I stopped . . . I felt sad at heart: under the bright but chill smile of fading nature, the dismal dread of coming winter seemed to steal upon me. High overhead flew a cautious crow, heavily and sharply cleaving the air with his wings; he turned his head, looked sideways at me, flapped his wings and, cawing abruptly, vanished behind the wood; a great flock of pigeons flew up playfully from a threshing floor, and suddenly eddying round in a column, scattered busily about the country. Sure sign of autumn! Some one came driving over the bare hillside, his empty cart rattling loudly. . . .

I turned homewards; but it was long before the figure of poor Akulina faded out of my mind, and her cornflowers, long since withered, are still in my keeping.

XX

THE HAMLET OF THE SHTCHIGRI DISTRICT

On one of my excursions I received an invitation to dine at the house of a rich landowner and sportsman, Alexandr Mihalitch G——. His property was four miles from the small village where I was staying at the time. I put on a frock-coat, an article without which I advise no one to travel, even on a hunting expedition, and betook myself to Alexandr Mihalitch's. The dinner was fixed for six o'clock ; I arrived at five, and found already a great number of gentlemen in uniforms, in civilian dress, and other nondescript garments. My host met me cordially, but soon hurried away to the butler's pantry. He was expecting a great dignitary, and was in a state of agitation not quite in keeping with his independent position in society and his wealth. Alexandr Mihalitch had never married, and did not care for women ; his house was the centre of a bachelor society. He lived in grand style ; he had enlarged and sumptuously redecorated his ancestral mansion, spent fifteen thousand roubles on wine

from Moscow every year, and enjoyed the highest public consideration. Alexandr Mihalitch had retired from the service ages ago, and had no ambition to gain official honours of any kind. What could have induced him to go out of his way to procure a guest of high official position, and to be in a state of excitement from early morning on the day of the grand dinner? That remains buried in the obscurity of the unknown, as a friend of mine, an attorney, is in the habit of saying when he is asked whether he takes bribes when kindly-disposed persons offer them.

On parting from my host, I began walking through the rooms. Almost all the guests were utterly unknown to me: about twenty persons were already seated at the card-tables. Among these devotees of preference were two warriors, with aristocratic but rather battered countenances, a few civilian officials, with tight high cravats and drooping dyed moustaches, such as are only to be found in persons of resolute character and strict conservative opinions: these conservative persons picked up their cards with dignity, and, without turning their heads, glared sideways at everyone who approached; and five or six local petty officials, with fair round bellies, fat, moist little hands, and staid, immovable little legs. These worthies spoke in a subdued voice, smiled benignly in all directions, held their cards close up to their very shirt-fronts, and when they trumped did not flap their cards on the table, but, on the contrary,

shed them with an undulatory motion on the green cloth, and packed their tricks together with a slight, unassuming, and decorous swish. The rest of the company were sitting on sofas, or hanging in groups about the doors or at the windows; one gentleman, no longer young, though of feminine appearance, stood in a corner, fidgeting, blushing, and twisting the seal of his watch over his stomach in his embarrassment, though no one was paying any attention to him; some others in swallow-tail coats and checked trousers, the handiwork of the tailor and Perpetual Master of the Tailors Corporation, Firs Klyuhin, were talking together with extraordinary ease and liveliness, turning their bald, greasy heads from side to side unconstrainedly as they talked; a young man of twenty, short-sighted and fair-haired, dressed from head to foot in black, obviously shy, smiled sarcastically. . . .

I was beginning, however, to feel bored, when suddenly I was joined by a young man, one Voinitsin by name, a student without a degree, who resided in the house of Alexandr Mihalitch in the capacity of . . . it would be hard to say precisely, of what. He was a first-rate shot, and could train dogs. I had known him before in Moscow. He was one of those young men who at every examination 'played at dumb-show,' that is to say, did not answer a single word to the professor's questions. Such persons were also designated 'the bearded students.' (You will gather that this was

in long past days.) This was how it used to be: they would call Voinitsin, for example. Voinitsin, who had sat upright and motionless in his place, bathed in a hot perspiration from head to foot, slowly and aimlessly looked about him, got up, hurriedly buttoned up his undergraduate's uniform, and edged up to the examiner's table. 'Take a paper, please,' the professor would say to him pleasantly. Voinitsin would stretch out his hand, and with trembling fingers fumble at the pile of papers. 'No selecting, if you please,' observed, in a jarring voice, an assistant-examiner, an irritable old gentleman, a professor in some other faculty, conceiving a sudden hatred for the unlucky bearded one. Voinitsin resigned himself to his fate, took a paper, showed the number on it, and went and sat down by the window, while his predecessor was answering his question. At the window Voinitsin never took his eyes off his paper, except that at times he looked slowly round as before, though he did not move a muscle. But his predecessor would finish at last, and would be dismissed with, 'Good! you can go,' or even 'Good indeed, very good!' according to his abilities. Then they call Voinitsin: Voinitsin gets up, and with resolute step approaches the table. 'Read your question,' they tell him. Voinitsin raises the paper in both hands up to his very nose, slowly reads it, and slowly drops his hands. 'Well, now, your answer, please,' the same professor remarks languidly, throwing himself backwards, and crossing his arms over his breast.

There reigns the silence of the tomb. 'Why are you silent?' Voinitsin is mute. The assistant-examiner begins to be restive. 'Well, say something!' Voinitsin is as still as if he were dead. All his companions gaze inquisitively at the back of his thick, close-cropped, motionless head. The assistant-examiner's eyes are almost starting out of his head; he positively hates Voinitsin. 'Well, this is strange, really,' observes the other examiner. 'Why do you stand as if you were dumb? Come, don't you know it? if so, say so.' 'Let me take another question,' the luckless youth articulates thickly. The professors look at one another. 'Well, take one,' the head-examiner answers, with a wave of the hand. Voinitsin again takes a paper, again goes to the window, again returns to the table, and again is silent as the grave. The assistant-examiner is capable of devouring him alive. At last they send him away and mark him a nought. You would think, 'Now, at least, he will go.' Not a bit of it! He goes back to his place, sits just as immovably to the end of the examination, and, as he goes out, exclaims: 'I 've been on the rack! what ill-luck!' and the whole of that day he wanders about Moscow, clutching every now and then at his head, and bitterly cursing his luckless fate. He never, of course, touched a book, and the next day the same story was repeated.

So this was the Voinitsin who joined me. We talked about Moscow, about sport.

'Would you like me,' he whispered to me suddenly, 'to introduce you to the first wit of these parts?'

'If you will be so kind.'

Voinitsin led me up to a little man, with a high tuft of hair on his forehead and moustaches, in a cinnamon-coloured frock-coat and striped cravat. His yellow, mobile features were certainly full of cleverness and sarcasm. His lips were perpetually curved in a flitting ironical smile; little black eyes, screwed up with an impudent expression, looked out from under uneven lashes. Beside him stood a country gentleman, broad, soft, and sweet — a veritable sugar-and-honey mixture—with one eye. He laughed in anticipation at the witticisms of the little man, and seemed positively melting with delight. Voinitsin presented me to the wit, whose name was Piotr Petrovitch Lupihin. We were introduced and exchanged the preliminary civilities.

'Allow me to present to you my best friend,' said Lupihin suddenly in a strident voice, seizing the sugary gentleman by the arm.

'Come, don't resist, Kirila Selifanitch,' he added; 'we're not going to bite you. I commend him to you,' he went on, while the embarrassed Kirila Selifanitch bowed with about as much grace as if he were undergoing a surgical operation; 'he's a most superior gentleman. He enjoyed excellent health up to the age of fifty, then suddenly conceived the idea of doctoring his eyes, in consequence of which he has lost one. Since then he

doctors his peasants with similar success. . . . They, to be sure, repay with similar devotion. . . .'

'What a fellow it is!' muttered Kirila Selifanitch. And he laughed.

'Speak out, my friend; eh, speak out!' Lupihin rejoined. 'Why, they may elect you a judge; I shouldn't wonder, and they will, too, you see. Well, to be sure, the secretaries will do the thinking for you, we may assume; but you know you'll have to be able to speak, anyhow, even if only to express the ideas of others. Suppose the governor comes and asks, "Why is it the judge stammers?" And they'd say, let's assume, "It's a paralytic stroke." "Then bleed him," he'd say. And it would be highly indecorous, in your position, you'll admit.'

The sugary gentleman was positively rolling with mirth.

'You see he laughs,' Lupihin pursued with a malignant glance at Kirila Selifanitch's heaving stomach. 'And why shouldn't he laugh?' he added, turning to me: 'he has enough to eat, good health, and no children; his peasants aren't mortgaged—to be sure, he doctors them—and his wife is cracked.' (Kirila Selifanitch turned a little away as though he were not listening, but he still continued to chuckle.) 'I laugh too, while my wife has eloped with a land-surveyor.' (He grinned.) 'Didn't you know that? What! Why, one fine day she ran away with him and left me a letter.

"Dear Piotr Petrovitch," she said, "forgive me: carried away by passion, I am leaving with the friend of my heart." . . . And the land-surveyor only took her fancy through not cutting his nails and wearing tight trousers. You're surprised at that? "Why, this," she said, "is a man with no dissimulation about him." . . . But mercy on us! Rustic fellows like us speak the truth too plainly. But let us move away a bit. . . . It's not for us to stand beside a future judge.' . . .

He took me by the arm, and we moved away to a window.

'I've the reputation of a wit here,' he said to me, in the course of conversation. 'You need not believe that. I'm simply an embittered man, and I do my railing aloud: that's how it is I'm so free and easy in my speech. And why should I mince matters, if you come to that; I don't care a straw for anyone's opinion, and I've nothing to gain; I'm spiteful—what of that? A spiteful man, at least, needs no wit. And, however enlightening it may be, you won't believe it. . . . I say, now, I say, look at our host! There! what is he running to and fro like that for? Upon my word, he keeps looking at his watch, smiling, perspiring, putting on a solemn face, keeping us all starving for our dinner! Such a prodigy! a real court grandee! Look, look, he's running again—bounding, positively, look!'

And Lupihin laughed shrilly.

'The only pity is, there are no ladies,' he re-

sumed with a deep sigh; 'it's a bachelor party, else that's when your humble servant gets on. Look, look,' he cried suddenly: 'Prince Kozelsky's come—that tall man there, with a beard, in yellow gloves. You can see at once he's been abroad . . . and he always arrives as late. He's as heavy, I tell you, by himself, as a pair of merchant's horses, and you should see how condescendingly he talks with your humble servant, how graciously he deigns to smile at the civilities of our starving mothers and daughters! . . . And he sometimes sets up for a wit, but he is only here for a little time; and oh, his witticisms! It's for all the world like hacking at a ship's cable with a blunt knife. He can't bear me. . . . I'm going to bow to him.'

And Lupihin ran off to meet the prince.

'And here comes my special enemy,' he observed, turning all at once to me. 'Do you see that fat man with the brown face and the bristles on his head, over there, that's got his cap clutched in his hand, and is creeping along by the wall and glaring in all directions like a wolf? I sold him for 400 roubles a horse worth 1000, and that stupid animal has a perfect right now to despise me; though all the while he is so destitute of all faculty of imagination, especially in the morning before his tea, or after dinner, that if you say "Good morning!" to him, he'll answer, "Is it?" 'And here comes the general,' pursued Lupihin, 'the civilian general, a retired, destitute general.

He has a daughter of beetroot-sugar, and a manufactory with scrofula. . . . Beg pardon, I 've got it wrong . . . but there, you understand. Ah! and the architect's turned up here! A German, and wears moustaches, and does not understand his business—a natural phenomenon! . . . though what need for him to understand his business so long as he takes bribes and sticks in pillars everywhere to suit the tastes of our pillars of society!'

Lupihin chuckled again.... But suddenly a wave of excitement passed over the whole house. The grandee had arrived. The host positively rushed into the hall. After him ran a few devoted members of the household and eager guests. . . . The noisy talk was transformed into a subdued pleasant chat, like the buzzing of bees in spring within their hives. Only the turbulent wasp, Lupihin, and the splendid drone, Kozelsky, did not subdue their voices. . . . And behold, at last, the queen!—the great dignitary entered. Hearts bounded to meet him, sitting bodies rose; even the gentleman who had bought a horse from Lupihin poked his chin into his chest. The great personage kept up his dignity in an inimitable manner; throwing his head back, as though he were bowing, he uttered a few words of approbation, of which each was prefaced by the syllable *er*, drawled through his nose; with a sort of devouring indignation he looked at Prince Kozelsky's democratic beard, and gave the destitute general with the factory and the daughter the forefinger of his right hand. After a

few minutes, in the course of which the dignitary had had time to observe twice that he was very glad he was not late for dinner, the whole company trooped into the dining-room, the swells first.

There is no need to describe to the reader how they put the great man in the most important place, between the civilian general and the marshal of the province, a man of an independent and dignified expression of face, in perfect keeping with his starched shirt-front, his expanse of waistcoat, and his round snuff-box full of French snuff; how our host bustled about, and ran up and down, fussing and pressing the guests to eat, smiling at the great man's back in passing, and hurriedly snatching a plate of soup or a bit of bread in a corner like a schoolboy; how the butler brought in a fish more than a yard long, with a nosegay in its mouth; how the surly-looking footmen in livery sullenly plied every gentleman, now with Malaga, now dry Madeira; and how almost all the gentlemen, particularly the more elderly ones, drank off glass after glass with an air of reluctantly resigning themselves to a sense of duty; and finally, how they began popping champagne bottles and proposing toasts: all that is probably only too well known to the reader. But what struck me as especially noteworthy was the anecdote told us by the great man himself amid a general delighted silence. Someone—I fancy it was the destitute general, a man familiar with

modern literature—referred to the influence of women in general, and especially on young men. 'Yes, yes,' chimed in the great man, 'that's true; but young men ought to be kept in strict subjection, or else, very likely, they'll go out of their senses over every petticoat." (A smile of child-like delight flitted over the faces of all the guests; positive gratitude could be seen in one gentleman's eyes.) 'For young men are idióts.' (The great man, I suppose for the sake of greater impressiveness, sometimes changed the accepted accentuation of words.)

'My son, Ivan, for instance,' he went on; 'the fool's only just twenty—and all at once he comes to me and says: "Let me be married, father." I told him he was a fool; told him he must go into the service first. . . . Well, there was despair—tears . . . but with me . . . no nonsense.' (The words 'no nonsense' the great man seemed to enunciate more with his stomach than his lips; he paused and glanced majestically at his neighbour, the general, while he raised his eyebrows higher than any one could have expected. The civilian general nodded agreeably a little on one side, and with extraordinary rapidity winked with the eye turned to the great man.) 'And what do you think?' the great man began again: 'now he writes to me himself, and thanks me for looking after him when he was a fool. . . . So that's the way to act.' All the guests, of course, were in complete agreement with the speaker, and seemed

quite cheered up by the pleasure and instruction they derived from him. . . . After dinner, the whole party rose and moved into the drawing-room with a great deal of noise—decorous, however; and, as it were, licensed for the occasion. . . . They sat down to cards.

I got through the evening somehow, and charging my coachman to have my carriage ready at five o'clock next morning, I went to my room. But I was destined, in the course of that same day, to make the acquaintance of a remarkable man.

In consequence of the great number of guests staying in the house, no one had a bedroom to himself. In the small, greenish, damp room to which I was conducted by Alexandr Mihalitch's butler, there was already another guest, quite undressed. On seeing me, he quickly ducked under the bed-clothes, covered himself up to the nose, turned a little on the soft feather-bed, and lay quiet, keeping a sharp look-out from under the round frill of his cotton night-cap. I went up to the other bed (there were only two in the room), undressed, and lay down in the damp sheets. My neighbour turned over in bed. . . . I wished him good-night.

Half-an-hour went by. In spite of all my efforts, I could not get to sleep: aimless and vague thoughts kept persistently and monotonously dragging one after another on an endless chain, like the buckets of a hydraulic machine.

'You're not asleep, I fancy?' observed my neighbour.

'No, as you see,' I answered. 'And you're not sleepy either, are you?'

'I'm never sleepy.'

'How's that?'

'Oh! I go to sleep—I don't know what for. I lie in bed, and lie in bed, and so get to sleep.'

'Why do you go to bed before you feel sleepy?'

'Why, what would you have me do?'

I made no answer to my neighbour's question.

'I wonder,' he went on, after a brief silence, 'how it is there are no fleas here? Where should there be fleas if not here, one wonders?'

'You seem to regret them,' I remarked.

'No, I don't regret them; but I like everything to be consecutive.'

'O-ho!' thought I; 'what words he uses.'

My neighbour was silent again.

'Would you like to make a bet with me?' he said again, rather loudly.

'What about?'

I began to be amused by him.

'Hm . . . what about? Why, about this: I'm certain you take me for a fool.'

'Really,' I muttered, astounded.

'For an ignoramus, for a rustic of the steppes. . . . Confess. . . .'

'I haven't the pleasure of knowing you,' I responded. 'What can make you infer? '

'Why, the sound of your voice is enough; you answer me so carelessly. . . . But I'm not at all what you suppose. . . .'

'Allow me. . .'

'No, you allow me. In the first place, I speak French as well as you, and German even better; secondly, I have spent three years abroad—in Berlin alone I lived eight months. I've studied Hegel, honoured sir; I know Goethe by heart: add to that, I was a long while in love with a German professor's daughter, and was married at home to a consumptive lady, who was bald, but a remarkable personality. So I'm a bird of your feather; I'm not a barbarian of the steppes, as you imagine. . . . I too have been bitten by reflection, and there's nothing obvious about me.'

I raised my head and looked with redoubled attention at the queer fellow. By the dim light of the night-lamp I could hardly distinguish his features.

'There, you're looking at me now,' he went on, setting his night-cap straight, 'and probably you're asking yourself, "How is it I didn't notice him to-day?" I'll tell you why you didn't notice me: because I didn't raise my voice; because I get behind other people, hang about doorways, and talk to no one; because, when the butler passes me with a tray, he raises his elbow to the level of my shoulder. . . . And how is it all that comes about? From two causes: first, I'm poor; and

secondly, I 've grown humble. . . . Tell the truth, you didn't notice me, did you?'

'Certainly, I 've not had the pleasure. . . .'

'There, there,' he interrupted me, 'I knew that.'

He raised himself and folded his arms; the long shadow of his cap was bent from the wall to the ceiling.

'And confess, now,' he added, with a sudden sideway glance at me; 'I must strike you as a queer fellow, an original, as they say, or possibly as something worse: perhaps you think I affect to be original!'

'I must repeat again that I don't know you. . . .'

He looked down an instant.

'Why have I begun talking so unexpectedly to you, a man utterly a stranger?—the Lord, the Lord only knows!' (He sighed.) 'Not through the natural affinity of our souls! Both you and I are respectable people, that 's to say, egoists: neither of us has the least concern with the other; isn't it so? But we are neither of us sleepy . . . so why not chat? I 'm in the mood, and that 's rare with me. I 'm shy, do you see? and not shy because I 'm a provincial, of no rank and poor, but because I 'm a fearfully vain person. But at times, under favourable circumstances, occasions which I could not, however, particularise nor foresee, my shyness vanishes completely, as at this moment, for instance. At this moment you might set me face to face with the Grand Lama, and I 'd ask him for a

pinch of snuff. But perhaps you want to go to sleep?'

'Quite the contrary,' I hastened to respond; 'it is a pleasure for me to talk to you.'

'That is, I amuse you, you mean to say. . . . All the better. . . . And so, I tell you, they call me here an original; that's what they call me when my name is casually mentioned, among other gossip. No one is much concerned about my fate. . . . They think it wounds me. . . . Oh, good Lord! if they only knew . . . it's just what's my ruin, that there is absolutely nothing original in me—nothing, except such freaks as, for instance, my conversation at this moment with you; but such freaks are not worth a brass farthing. That's the cheapest and lowest sort of originality.'

He turned facing me, and waved his hands.

'Honoured sir!' he cried, 'I am of the opinion that life on earth's only worth living, as a rule, for original people; it's only they who have a right to live. *Mon verre n'est pas grand, mais je bois dans mon verre*, said someone. Do you see,' he added in an undertone, 'how well I pronounce French? What is it to one if one's a capacious brain, and understands everything, and knows a lot, and keeps pace with the age, if one's nothing of one's own, of oneself! One more storehouse for hackneyed commonplaces in the world; and what good does that do to anyone? No, better be stupid even, but in one's own way! One should have a flavour of one's own, one's individual flavour;

that's the thing! And don't suppose that I am very exacting as to that flavour. . . . God forbid! There are no end of original people of the sort I mean: look where you will—there's an original: every live man is an original; but I am not to be reckoned among them!'

'And yet,' he went on, after a brief silence, 'in my youth what expectations I aroused! What a high opinion I cherished of my own individuality before I went abroad, and even, at first, after my return! Well, abroad I kept my ears open, held aloof from everyone, as befits a man like me, who is always seeing through things by himself, and at the end has not understood the A B C!'

'An original, an original!' he hurried on, shaking his head reproachfully. . . . 'They call me an original. . . . In reality, it turns out that there's not a man in the world less original than your humble servant. I must have been born even in imitation of someone else. . . . Oh, dear! It seems I am living, too, in imitation of the various authors studied by me; in the sweat of my brow I live: and I've studied, and fallen in love, and married, in fact, as it were, not through my own will—as it were, fulfilling some sort of duty, or sort of fate—who's to make it out?'

He tore the nightcap off his head and flung it on the bed.

'Would you like me to tell you the story of my life?' he asked me in an abrupt voice; 'or, rather, a few incidents of my life?'

'Please do me the favour.'

'Or, no, I'd better tell you how I got married. You see marriage is an important thing, the touchstone that tests the whole man: in it, as in a glass, is reflected. . . . But that sounds too hackneyed. . . . If you'll allow me, I'll take a pinch of snuff.'

He pulled a snuff-box from under his pillow, opened it, and began again, waving the open snuff-box about.

'Put yourself, honoured sir, in my place. . . . Judge for yourself, what, now what, tell me as a favour: what benefit could I derive from the encyclopædia of Hegel? What is there in common, tell me, between that encyclopædia and Russian life? and how would you advise me to apply it to our life, and not it, the encyclopædia only, but German philosophy in general. . . . I will say more—science itself?'

He gave a bound on the bed and muttered to himself, gnashing his teeth angrily.

'Ah, that's it, that's it! . . . Then why did you go trailing off abroad? Why didn't you stay at home and study the life surrounding you on the spot? You might have found out its needs and its future, and have come to a clear comprehension of your vocation, so to say. . . . But, upon my word,' he went on, changing his tone again as though timidly justifying himself, 'where is one to study what no sage has yet inscribed in any book? I should have been glad

indeed to take lessons of her—of Russian life, I mean—but she's dumb, the poor dear. You must take her as she is; but that's beyond my power: you must give me the inference; you must present me with a conclusion. Here you have a conclusion too: listen to our wise men of Moscow—they're a set of nightingales worth listening to, aren't they? Yes, that's the pity of it, that they pipe away like Kursk nightingales, instead of talking as the people talk. . . . Well, I thought, and thought—"Science, to be sure," I thought, "is everywhere the same, and truth is the same"—so I was up and off, in God's name, to foreign parts, to the heathen. . . . What would you have? I was infatuated with youth and conceit; I didn't want, you know, to get fat before my time, though they say it's healthy. Though, indeed, if nature doesn't put the flesh on your bones, you won't see much fat on your body!'

'But I fancy,' he added, after a moment's thought, 'I promised to tell you how I got married—listen. First, I must tell you that my wife is no longer living; secondly . . . secondly, I see I must give you some account of my youth, or else you won't be able to make anything out of it. . . . But don't you want to go to sleep?'

'No, I'm not sleepy.'

'That's good news. Hark! . . . how vulgarly Mr. Kantagryuhin is snoring in the next room! I was the son of parents of small property—I say

parents, because, according to tradition, I had once had a father as well as a mother. I don't remember him: he was a narrow-minded man, I've been told, with a big nose, freckles, and red hair; he used to take snuff on one side of his nose only; his portrait used to hang in my mother's bedroom, and very hideous he was in a red uniform with a black collar up to his ears. They used to take me to be whipped before him, and my mother used always on such occasions to point to him, saying, "He would give it to you much more if he were here." You can imagine what an encouraging effect that had on me. I had no brother nor sister—that's to say, speaking accurately, I had once had a brother knocking about, with the English disease in his neck, but he soon died. . . . And why ever, one wonders, should the English disease make its way to the Shtchigri district of the province of Kursk? But that's neither here nor there. My mother undertook my education with all the vigorous zeal of a country lady of the steppes: she undertook it from the solemn day of my birth till the time when my sixteenth year had come. . . . You are following my story?'

'Yes, please go on.'

'All right. Well, when I was sixteen, my mother promptly dismissed my teacher of French, a German, Filipóvitch, from the Greek settlement of Nyezhin. She conducted me to Moscow, put down my name for the university, and gave up her soul

to the Almighty, leaving me in the hands of my uncle, the attorney Koltun-Babur, one of a sort well-known not only in the Shtchigri district. My uncle, the attorney Koltun-Babur, plundered me to the last half-penny, after the custom of guardians. . . . But again that's neither here nor there. I entered the university—I must do so much justice to my mother—rather well grounded; but my lack of originality was even then apparent. My childhood was in no way distinguished from the childhood of other boys; I grew up just as languidly and dully—much as if I were under a feather-bed—just as early I began repeating poetry by heart and moping under the pretence of a dreamy inclination . . . for what?—why, for the beautiful . . . and so on. In the university I went on in the same way; I promptly got into a "circle." Times were different then. . . . But you don't know, perhaps, what sort of thing a student's "circle" is? I remember Schiller said somewhere:

Gefährlich ist's den Leu zu wecken
Und schrecklich ist des Tigers Zahn,
Doch das schrecklichste der Schrecken
Das ist der Mensch in seinem Wahn!

He didn't mean that, I can assure you; he meant to say: *Das ist ein* circle *in der Stadt Moskau!'*

'But what do you find so awful in the circle?' I asked.

My neighbour snatched his cap and pulled it down on to his nose.

'What do I find so awful?' he shouted. 'Why,

this: the circle is the destruction of all independent development; the circle is a hideous substitute for society, woman, life; the circle . . . oh, wait a bit, I 'll tell you what a circle is! A circle is a slothful, dull living side by side in common, to which is attached a serious significance and a show of rational activity; the circle replaces conversation by debate, trains you in fruitless discussion, draws you away from solitary, useful labour, develops in you the itch for authorship—deprives you, in fact, of all freshness and virgin vigour of soul. The circle—why, it 's vulgarity and boredom under the name of brotherhood and friendship! a concatenation of misunderstandings and cavillings under the pretence of openness and sympathy: in the circle—thanks to the right of every friend, at all hours and seasons, to poke his unwashed fingers into the very inmost soul of his comrade—no one has a single spot in his soul pure and undefiled; in the circle they fall down before the shallow, vain, smart talker and the premature wise-acre, and worship the rhymester with no poetic gift, but full of "subtle" ideas; in the circle young lads of seventeen talk glibly and learnedly of women and of love, while in the presence of women they are dumb or talk to them like a book—and what do they talk about? The circle is the hot-bed of glib fluency; in the circle they spy on one another like so many police officials. . . . Oh, circle! thou 'rt not a circle, but an enchanted ring, which has been the ruin of many a decent fellow!'

'Come, you're exaggerating, allow me to observe,' I broke in.

My neighbour looked at me in silence.

'Perhaps, God knows, perhaps. But, you see, there's only one pleasure left your humble servant, and that's exaggeration—well, that was the way I spent four years in Moscow. I can't tell you, my dear sir, how quickly, how fearfully quickly, that time passed; it's positively painful and vexatious to remember. Some mornings one gets up, and it's like sliding downhill on little sledges. . . . Before one can look round, one's flown to the bottom; it's evening already, and already the sleepy servant is pulling on one's coat; one dresses, and trails off to a friend, and may be smokes a pipe, drinks weak tea in glasses, and discusses German philosophy, love, the eternal sunshine of the spirit, and other far-fetched topics. But even there I met original, independent people: however some men stultify themselves and warp themselves out of shape, still nature asserts itself; I alone, poor wretch, moulded myself like soft wax, and my pitiful little nature never made the faintest resistance! Meantime I had reached my twenty-first year. I came into possession of my inheritance, or, more correctly speaking, that part of my inheritance which my guardian had thought fit to leave me, gave a freed house-serf Vassily Kudryashev a warranty to superintend all my patrimony, and set off abroad to Berlin. I was abroad, as I have already had the pleasure of

telling you, three years. Well. There too, abroad too, I remained the same unoriginal creature. In the first place, I need not say that of Europe, of European life, I really learnt nothing. I listened to German professors and read German books on their birthplace: that was all the difference. I led as solitary a life as any monk; I got on good terms with a retired lieutenant, weighed down, like myself, by a thirst for knowledge but always dull of comprehension, and not gifted with a flow of words; I made friends with slow-witted families from Penza and other agricultural provinces, hung about *cafés*, read the papers, in the evening went to the theatre. With the natives I associated very little; I talked to them with constraint, and never had one of them to see me at my own place, except two or three intrusive fellows of Jewish extraction, who were constantly running in upon me and borrowing money—thanks to *der Russe's* gullibility. A strange freak of chance brought me at last to the house of one of my professors. It was like this: I came to him to enter my name for a course of lectures, and he, all of a sudden, invited me to an evening party at his house. This professor had two daughters, of twenty-seven, such stumpy little things—God bless them!—with such majestic noses, frizzed curls and pale-blue eyes, and red hands with white nails. One was called Linchen and the other Minchen. I began to go to the professor's. I ought to tell you that the professor was not

exactly stupid, but seemed, as it were, dazed: in his professorial desk he spoke fairly consecutively, but at home he lisped, and always had his spectacles on his forehead—he was a very learned man, though. Well, suddenly it seemed to me that I was in love with Linchen, and for six whole months this impression remained. I talked to her, it's true, very little—it was more that I looked at her; but I used to read various touching passages aloud to her, to press her hand on the sly, and to dream beside her in the evenings, gazing persistently at the moon, or else simply up aloft. Besides, she made such delicious coffee! One asks oneself—what more could one desire? Only one thing troubled me: at the very moments of ineffable bliss, as it's called, I always had a sort of sinking in the pit of the stomach, and a cold shudder ran down my back. At last I could not stand such happiness, and ran away. Two whole years after that I was abroad: I went to Italy, stood before the Transfiguration in Rome, and before the Venus in Florence, and suddenly fell into exaggerated raptures, as though an attack of delirium had come upon me; in the evenings I wrote verses, began a diary; in fact, there too I behaved just like everyone else. And just mark how easy it is to be original! I take no interest, for instance, in painting and sculpture. . . . But simply saying so aloud . . . no, it was impossible! I must needs take a cicerone, and run to gaze at the frescoes.' . . .

He looked down again, and again pulled off his nightcap.

'Well, I came back to my own country at last,' he went on in a weary voice. 'I went to Moscow. In Moscow a marvellous transformation took place in me. Abroad I was mostly silent, but now suddenly I began to talk with unexpected smartness, and at the same time I began to conceive all sorts of ideas of myself. There were kindly disposed persons to be found, to whom I seemed all but a genius; ladies listened sympathetically to my diatribes; but I was not able to keep on the summit of my glory. One fine morning a slander sprang up about me (who had originated it, I don't know; it must have been some old maid of the male sex—there are any number of such old maids in Moscow); it sprang up and began to throw off outshoots and tendrils like a strawberry plant. I was abashed, tried to get out of it, to break through its clinging toils—that was no good. . . . I went away. Well, in that too I showed that I was an absurd person; I ought to have calmly waited for the storm to blow over, just as one waits for the end of nettle-rash, and the same kindly-disposed persons would have opened their arms to me again, the same ladies would have smiled approvingly again at my remarks. . . . But what's wrong is just that I'm not an original person. Conscientious scruples, please to observe, had been stirred up in me; I was somehow ashamed of

talk, talk without ceasing, nothing but talk—yesterday in Arbat, to-day in Truba, to-morrow in Sivtsevy-Vrazhky, and all about the same thing. . . . But if that is what people want of me? Look at the really successful men in that line: they don't ask its use; on the contrary, it's all they need; some will keep their tongues wagging twenty years together, and always in one direction. . . . That's what comes of self-confidence and conceit! I had that too, conceit—indeed, even now it's not altogether stifled. . . . But what was wrong was that—I say again, I'm not an original person—I stopped midway: nature ought to have given me far more conceit or none at all. But at first I felt the change a very hard one; moreover, my stay abroad too had utterly drained my resources, while I was not disposed to marry a merchant's daughter, young, but flabby as a jelly, so I retired to my country place. I fancy,' added my neighbour, with another glance sideways at me, 'I may pass over in silence the first impressions of country life, references to the beauty of nature, the gentle charm of solitude, etc.'

'You can, indeed,' I put in.

'All the more,' he continued, 'as all that's nonsense; at least, as far as I'm concerned. I was as bored in the country as a puppy locked up, though I will own that on my journey home, when I passed through the familiar birchwood in spring for the first time, my head was in a whirl and my heart beat with a vague, sweet expectation. But

these vague expectations, as you're well aware, never come to pass; on the other hand, very different things do come to pass, which you don't at all expect, such as cattle disease, arrears, sales by auction, and so on, and so on. I managed to make a shift from day to day with the aid of my agent, Yakov, who replaced the former superintendent, and turned out in the course of time to be as great, if not a greater robber, and over and above that poisoned my existence by the smell of his tarred boots; suddenly one day I remembered a family I knew in the neighbourhood, consisting of the widow of a retired colonel and her two daughters, ordered out my droshky, and set off to see them. That day must always be a memorable one for me; six months later I was married to the retired colonel's second daughter! . . .'

The speaker dropped his head, and lifted his hands to heaven.

'And now,' he went on warmly, 'I couldn't bear to give you an unfavourable opinion of my late wife. Heaven forbid! She was the most generous, sweetest creature, a loving nature capable of any sacrifice, though I must between ourselves confess that if I had not had the misfortune to lose her, I should probably not be in a position to be talking to you to-day; since the beam is still there in my barn, to which I repeatedly made up my mind to hang myself!'

'Some pears,' he began again, after a brief pause, 'need to lie in an underground cellar for a

time, to come, as they say, to their real flavour; my wife, it seems, belonged to a similar order of nature's works. It's only now that I do her complete justice. It's only now, for instance, that memories of some evenings I spent with her before marriage no longer awaken the slightest bitterness, but move me almost to tears. They were not rich people; their house was very old-fashioned and built of wood, but comfortable; it stood on a hill between an overgrown courtyard and a garden run wild. At the bottom of the hill ran a river, which could just be seen through the thick leaves. A wide terrace led from the house to the garden; before the terrace flaunted a long flower-bed, covered with roses; at each end of the flower-bed grew two acacias, which had been trained to grow into the shape of a screw by its late owner. A little farther, in the very midst of a thicket of neglected and overgrown raspberries, stood an arbour, smartly painted within, but so old and tumble-down outside that it was depressing to look at it. A glass door led from the terrace into the drawing-room; in the drawing-room this was what met the eye of the inquisitive spectator: in the various corners stoves of Dutch tiles, a squeaky piano to the right, piled with manuscript music, a sofa, covered with faded blue material with a whitish pattern, a round table, two what-nots of china and glass, knicknacks of the Catherine period; on the wall the well-known picture of a flaxen-haired girl with a dove on her breast and

eyes turned upwards ; on the table a vase of fresh roses. You see how minutely I describe it. In that drawing-room, on that terrace, was rehearsed all the tragi-comedy of my love. The colonel's wife herself was an ill-natured old dame, whose voice was always hoarse with spite—a petty, snappish creature. Of the daughters, one, Vera, did not differ in any respect from the common run of young ladies of the provinces ; the other, Sofya, I fell in love with. The two sisters had another little room too, their common bedroom, with two innocent little wooden bedsteads, yellowish albums, mignonette, portraits of friends sketched in pencil rather badly (among them was one gentleman with an exceptionally vigorous expression of face and a still more vigorous signature, who had in his youth raised disproportionate expectations, but had come, like all of us, to nothing), with busts of Goethe and Schiller, German books, dried wreaths, and other objects, kept as souvenirs. But that room I rarely and reluctantly entered ; I felt stifled there somehow. And, too, strange to say, I liked Sofya best of all when I was sitting with my back to her, or still more, perhaps, when I was thinking or dreaming about her in the evening on the terrace. At such times I used to gaze at the sunset, at the trees, at the tiny leaves, already in darkness, but standing out sharply against the rosy sky ; in the drawing-room Sofya sat at the piano continually playing over and over again some favourite, passionately pathetic phrase from Beet-

hoven; the ill-natured old lady snored peacefully, sitting on the sofa; in the dining-room, which was flooded by a glow of lurid light, Vera was bustling about getting tea; the samovar hissed merrily as though it were pleased at something; the cracknels snapped with a pleasant crispness, and the spoons tinkled against the cups; the canary, which trilled mercilessly all day, was suddenly still, and only chirruped from time to time, as though asking for something; from a light transparent cloud there fell a few passing drops of rain. . . . And I would sit and sit, listen, listen, and look, my heart would expand, and again it seemed to me that I was in love. Well, under the influence of such an evening, I one day asked the old lady for her daughter's hand, and two months later I was married. It seemed to me that I loved her. . . . By now, indeed, it's time I should know, but, by God, even now I don't know whether I loved Sofya. She was a sweet creature, clever, silent, and warm-hearted, but God only knows from what cause, whether from living too long in the country, or for some other reason, there was at the bottom of her heart (if only there is a bottom to the heart) a secret wound, or, to put it better, a little open sore which nothing could heal, to which neither she nor I could give a name. Of the existence of this sore, of course, I only guessed after marriage. The struggles I had over it . . . nothing availed! When I was a child I had a little bird, which had once been caught by the cat

in its claws; it was saved and tended, but the poor bird never got right; it moped, it pined, it ceased to sing. . . . It ended by a rat getting into its open cage one night and biting off its beak, after which it made up its mind at last to die. I don't know what cat had caught my wife in its claws, but she too moped and pined just like my unlucky bird. Sometimes she obviously made an effort to shake herself, to rejoice in the open air, in the sunshine and freedom; she would try, and shrink up into herself again. And, you know she loved me; how many times has she assured me that she had nothing left to wish for?—oof! damn my soul! and the light was fading out of her eyes all the while. I wondered whether there hadn't been something in her past. I made investigations: there was nothing forthcoming. Well, you may form your own judgment; an original man would have shrugged his shoulders and heaved a sigh or two, perhaps, and would have proceeded to live his own life; but I, not being an original creature, began to contemplate a beam and halter. My wife was so thoroughly permeated by all the habits of an old maid—Beethoven, evening walks, mignonette, corresponding with her friends, albums, et cetera—that she never could accustom herself to any other mode of life, especially to the life of the mistress of a house; and yet it seemed absurd for a married woman to be pining in vague melancholy and singing in the evening: "Waken her not at the dawn!"

'Well, we were blissful after that fashion for three years; in the fourth, Sofya died in her first confinement, and, strange to say, I had felt, as it were, beforehand that she would not be capable of giving me a daughter or a son—of giving the earth a new inhabitant. I remember how they buried her. It was in the spring. Our parish church was small and old, the screen was blackened, the walls bare, the brick floor worn into hollows in parts; there was a big, old-fashioned holy picture in each half of the choir. They brought in the coffin, placed it in the middle before the holy gates, covered it with a faded pall, set three candlesticks about it. The service commenced. A decrepit deacon, with a little shock of hair behind, belted low down with a green kerchief, was mournfully mumbling before a reading-desk; a priest, also an old man, with a kindly, purblind face, in a lilac cassock with yellow flowers on it, served the mass for himself and the deacon. At all the open windows the fresh young leaves were stirring and whispering, and the smell of the grass rose from the churchyard outside; the red flame of the wax-candles paled in the bright light of the spring day; the sparrows were twittering all over the church, and every now and then there came the ringing cry of a swallow flying in under the cupola. In the golden motes of the sunbeams the brown heads of the few peasants kept rising and dropping down again as they prayed earnestly for the dead; in a thin

bluish stream the smoke issued from the holes of the censer. I looked at the dead face of my wife. . . . My God! even death—death itself—had not set her free, had not healed her wound: the same sickly, timid, dumb look, as though, even in her coffin, she were ill at ease. . . . My heart was filled with bitterness. A sweet, sweet creature she was, and she did well for herself to die!'

The speaker's cheeks flushed, and his eyes grew dim.

'When at last,' he began again, 'I emerged from the deep depression which overwhelmed me after my wife's death, I resolved to devote myself, as it is called, to work. I went into a government office in the capital of the province; but in the great apartments of the government institution my head ached, and my eyesight too began to fail: other incidental causes came in. . . . I retired. I had thought of going on a visit to Moscow, but, in the first place, I hadn't the money, and secondly . . . I've told you already: I'm resigned. This resignation came upon me both suddenly and not suddenly. In spirit I had long ago resigned myself, but my brain was still unwilling to accept the yoke. I ascribed my humble temper and ideas to the influence of country life and happiness! . . . On the other side, I had long observed that all my neighbours, young and old alike, who had been frightened at first by my learning, my residence abroad, and my other advantages of education, had not only had time to get com-

pletely used to me, but had even begun to treat me half-rudely, half-contemptuously, did not listen to my observations, and, in talking to me, no longer made use of superfluous signs of respect. I forgot to tell you, too, that during the first year after my marriage, I had tried to launch into literature, and even sent a thing to a journal—a story, if I 'm not mistaken; but in a little time I received a polite letter from the editor, in which, among other things, I was told that he could not deny I had intelligence, but he was obliged to say I had no talent, and talent alone was what was needed in literature. To add to this, it came to my knowledge that a young man, on a visit from Moscow—a most good-natured youth too—had referred to me at an evening party at the governor's as a shallow person, antiquated and behind the times. But my half-wilful blindness still persisted: I was unwilling to give myself a slap in the face, you know; at last, one fine morning, my eyes were opened. This was how it happened. The district captain of police came to see me, with the object of calling my attention to a tumble-down bridge on my property, which I had absolutely no money to repair. After consuming a glass of vodka and a snack of dried fish, this condescending guardian of order reproached me in a paternal way for my heedlessness, sympathising, however, with my position, and only advising me to order my peasants to patch up the bridge with some rubbish; he lighted a pipe, and began talking of the coming

elections. A candidate for the honourable post of marshal of the province was at that time one Orbassanov, a noisy, shallow fellow, who took bribes into the bargain. Besides, he was not distinguished either for wealth or for family. I expressed my opinion with regard to him, and rather casually too: I regarded Mr. Orbassanov, I must own, as beneath my level. The police-captain looked at me, patted me amicably on the shoulder, and said good-naturedly: "Come, come, Vassily Vassilyevitch, it's not for you and me to criticise men like that—how are we qualified to? Let the shoemaker stick to his last." "But, upon my word," I retorted with annoyance, "whatever difference is there between me and Mr. Orbassanov?" The police-captain took his pipe out of his mouth, opened his eyes wide, and fairly roared. "Well, you're an amusing chap," he observed at last, while the tears ran down his cheeks: "what a joke to make! . . . Ah! you are a funny fellow!" And till his departure he never ceased jeering at me, now and then giving me a poke in the ribs with his elbow, and addressing me by my Christian name. He went away at last. This was enough: it was the last drop, and my cup was overflowing. I paced several times up and down the room, stood still before the looking-glass and gazed a long, long while at my embarrassed countenance, and deliberately putting out my tongue, I shook my head with a bitter smile. The scales fell from my eyes: I saw

clearly, more clearly than I saw my face in the glass, what a shallow, insignificant, worthless, unoriginal person I was!'

He paused.

'In one of Voltaire's tragedies,' he went on wearily, 'there is some worthy who rejoices that he has reached the furthest limit of unhappiness. Though there is nothing tragic in my fate, I will admit I have experienced something of that sort. I have known the bitter transports of cold despair; I have felt how sweet it is, lying in bed, to curse deliberately for a whole morning together the hour and day of my birth. I could not resign myself all at once. And indeed, think of it yourself: I was kept by impecuniosity in the country, which I hated; I was not fitted for managing my land, nor for the public service, nor for literature, nor anything; my neighbours I didn't care for, and books I loathed; as for the mawkish and morbidly sentimental young ladies who shake their curls and feverishly harp on the word "life," I had ceased to have any attraction for them ever since I gave up ranting and gushing; complete solitude I could not face. . . . I began—what do you suppose?—I began hanging about, visiting my neighbours. As though drunk with self-contempt, I purposely exposed myself to all sorts of petty slights. I was missed over in serving at table; I was met with supercilious coldness, and at last was not noticed at all; I was not even allowed to take part in general conversation, and from my

corner I myself used purposely to back up some stupid talker who in those days at Moscow would have ecstatically licked the dust off my feet, and kissed the hem of my cloak. . . . I did not even allow myself to believe that I was enjoying the bitter satisfaction of irony. . . . What sort of irony, indeed, can a man enjoy in solitude? Well, so I have behaved for some years on end, and so I behave now.'

'Really, this is beyond everything,' grumbled the sleepy voice of Mr. Kantagryuhin from the next room: 'what fool is it that has taken a fancy to talk all night?'

The speaker promptly ducked under the clothes and peeping out timidly, held up his finger to me warningly.

'Sh—sh—!' he whispered; and, as it were, bowing apologetically in the direction of Kantagryuhin's voice, he said respectfully: 'I obey, sir, I obey; I beg your pardon. . . . It's permissible for him to sleep; he ought to sleep,' he went on again in a whisper: 'he must recruit his energies—well, if only to eat his dinner with the same relish to-morrow. We have no right to disturb him. Besides, I think I've told you all I wanted to; probably you're sleepy too. I wish you good-night.'

He turned away with feverish rapidity and buried his head in the pillow.

'Let me at least know,' I asked, 'with whom I have had the pleasure. . . .'

He raised his head quickly.

'No, for mercy's sake!' he cut me short, 'don't inquire my name either of me or of others. Let me remain to you an unknown being, crushed by fate, Vassily Vassilyevitch. Besides, as an unoriginal person, I don't deserve an individual name. . . . But if you really want to give me some title, call me . . . call me the Hamlet of the Shtchigri district. There are many such Hamlets in every district, but perhaps you haven't come across others. . . . After which, goodbye.'

He buried himself again in his feather-bed, and the next morning, when they came to wake me, he was no longer in the room. He had left before daylight.

XXI

TCHERTOP-HANOV AND NEDOPYUSKIN

ONE hot summer day I was coming home from hunting in a light cart; Yermolaï sat beside me dozing and scratching his nose. The sleeping dogs were jolted up and down like lifeless bodies under our feet. The coachman kept flicking gadflies off the horses with his whip. The white dust rose in a light cloud behind the cart. We drove in between bushes. The road here was full of ruts, and the wheels began catching in the twigs. Yermolaï started up and looked round. . . . 'Hullo!' he said; 'there ought to be grouse here. Let's get out.' We stopped and went into the thicket. My dog hit upon a covey. I took a shot and was beginning to reload, when suddenly there was a loud crackling behind me, and a man on horseback came towards me, pushing the bushes apart with his hands. 'Sir . . . pe-ermit me to ask,' he began in a haughty voice, 'by what right you are—er—shooting here, sir?' The stranger spoke extraordinarily quickly, jerkily and condescendingly. I looked at his face; never in my life

have I seen anything like it. Picture to yourselves, gentle readers, a little flaxen-haired man, with a little turn-up red nose and long red moustaches. A pointed Persian cap with a crimson cloth crown covered his forehead right down to his eyebrows. He was dressed in a shabby yellow Caucasian overcoat, with black velveteen cartridge pockets on the breast, and tarnish silver braid on all the seams; over his shoulder was slung a horn; in his sash was sticking a dagger. A raw-boned, hook-nosed chestnut horse shambled unsteadily under his weight; two lean, crook-pawed greyhounds kept turning round just under the horse's legs. The face, the glance, the voice, every action, the whole being of the stranger, was expressive of a wild daring and an unbounded, incredible pride; his pale-blue glassy eyes strayed about with a sideway squint like a drunkard's; he flung back his head, puffed out his cheeks, snorted and quivered all over, as though bursting with dignity—for all the world like a turkey-cock. He repeated his question.

'I didn't know it was forbidden to shoot here,' I replied.

'You are here, sir,' he continued, 'on my land.'

'With your permission, I will go off it.'

'But pe-ermit me to ask,' he rejoined, 'is it a nobleman I have the honour of addressing?'

I mentioned my name.

'In that case, oblige me by hunting here. I am a nobleman myself, and am very pleased to do any service to a nobleman. . . . And my name is

Panteley Tchertop-hanov.' He bowed, hallooed, gave his horse a lash on the neck; the horse shook its head, reared, shied, and trampled on a dog's paws. The dog gave a piercing squeal. Tchertop-hanov boiled over with rage; foaming at the mouth, he struck the horse with his fist on the head between the ears, leaped to the ground quicker than lightning, looked at the dog's paw, spat on the wound, gave it a kick in the ribs to stop its whining, caught on to the horse's forelock, and put his foot in the stirrup. The horse flung up its head, and with its tail in the air edged away into the bushes; he followed it, hopping on one leg; he got into the saddle at last, however, flourished his whip in a sort of frenzy, blew his horn, and galloped off. I had not time to recover from the unexpected appearance of Tchertop-hanov, when suddenly, almost without any noise, there came out of the bushes a stoutish man of forty on a little black nag. He stopped, took off his green leather cap, and in a thin, subdued voice he asked me whether I hadn't seen a horseman riding a chestnut? I answered that I had.

'Which way did the gentleman go?' he went on in the same tone, without putting on his cap.

'Over there.'

'I humbly thank you, sir.'

He made a kissing sound with his lips, swung his legs against his horse's sides, and fell into a jog-trot in the direction indicated. I looked after him till his peaked cap was hidden behind the

branches. This second stranger was not in the least like his predecessor in exterior. His face, plump and round as a ball, expressed bashfulness, good-nature, and humble meekness; his nose, also plump and round and streaked with blue veins, betokened a sensualist. On the front of his head there was not a single hair left, some thin brown tufts stuck out behind; there was an ingratiating twinkle in his little eyes, set in long slits, and a sweet smile on his red, juicy lips. He had on a coat with a stand-up collar and brass buttons, very worn but clean; his cloth trousers were hitched up high, his fat calves were visible above the yellow tops of his boots.

'Who's that?' I inquired of Yermolaï.

'That? Nedopyuskin, Tihon Ivanitch. He lives at Tchertop-hanov's.'

'What is he, a poor man?'

'He's not rich; but, to be sure, Tchertop-hanov's not got a brass farthing either.'

'Then why does he live with him?'

'Oh, they made friends. One's never seen without the other. . . . It's a fact, indeed—where the horse puts its hoof, there the crab sticks its claw. . . .'

We got out of the bushes; suddenly two hounds 'gave tongue' close to us, and a big hare bounded through the oats, which were fairly high by now. The dogs, hounds and harriers, leaped out of the thicket after him, and after the dogs flew out Tchertop-hanov himself. He did not shout, nor

urge the dogs on, nor halloo; he was breathless and gasping; broken, senseless sounds were jerked out of his gaping mouth now and then; he dashed on, his eyes starting out of his head, and furiously lashed at his luckless horse with the whip. The harriers were gaining on the hare . . . it squatted for a moment, doubled sharply back, and darted past Yermolaï into the bushes. . . . The harriers rushed in pursuit. 'Lo-ok out! lo-ok out!' the exhausted horseman articulated with effort, in a sort of stutter: 'lo-ok out, friend!' Yermolaï shot . . . the wounded hare rolled head over heels on the smooth dry grass, leaped into the air, and squealed piteously in the teeth of a worrying dog. The hounds crowded about her. Like an arrow, Tchertop-hanov flew off his horse, clutched his dagger, ran straddling among the dogs with furious imprecations, snatched the mangled hare from them, and, creasing up his whole face, he buried the dagger in its throat up to the very hilt . . . buried it, and began hallooing. Tihon Ivanitch made his appearance on the edge of the thicket. 'Ho-ho-ho-ho-ho-ho-ho-ho!' vociferated Tchertop-hanov a second time. 'Ho-ho-ho-ho,' his companion repeated placidly.

'But really, you know, one ought not to hunt in summer,' I observed to Tchertop-hanov, pointing to the trampled-down oats.

'It's my field,' answered Tchertop-hanov, gasping.

He pulled the hare into shape, hung it on

to his saddle, and flung the paws among the dogs.

'I owe you a charge, my friend, by the rules of hunting,' he said, addressing Yermolaï. 'And you, dear sir,' he added in the same jerky, abrupt voice, 'my thanks.'

He mounted his horse.

'Pe-ermit me to ask . . . I've forgotten your name and your father's.'

Again I told him my name.

'Delighted to make your acquaintance. When you have an opportunity, hope you'll come and see me. . . . But where is that Fomka, Tihon Ivanitch?' he went on with heat; 'the hare was run down without him.'

'His horse fell down under him,' replied Tihon Ivanitch with a smile.

'Fell down! Orbassan fell down? Pugh! tut! . . . Where is he?'

'Over there, behind the copse.'

Tchertop-hanov struck his horse on the muzzle with his whip, and galloped off at a breakneck pace. Tihon Ivanitch bowed to me twice, once for himself and once for his companion, and again set off at a trot into the bushes.

These two gentlemen aroused my curiosity keenly. What could unite two creatures so different in the bonds of an inseparable friendship? I began to make inquiries. This was what I learned.

Panteley Eremyitch Tchertop-hanov had the

reputation in the whole surrounding vicinity of a dangerous, crack-brained fellow, haughty and quarrelsome in the extreme. He had served a very short time in the army, and had retired from the service through 'difficulties' with his superiors, with that rank which is generally regarded as equivalent to no rank at all. He came of an old family, once rich; his forefathers lived sumptuously, after the manner of the steppes—that is, they welcomed all, invited or uninvited, fed them to exhaustion, gave out oats by the quarter to their guests' coachmen for their teams, kept musicians, singers, jesters, and dogs; on festive days regaled their people with spirits and beer, drove to Moscow in the winter with their own horses, in heavy old coaches, and sometimes were for whole months without a farthing, living on home-grown produce. The estate came into Panteley Eremyitch's father's hands in a crippled condition; he, in his turn, 'played ducks and drakes' with it, and when he died, left his sole heir, Panteley, the small mortgaged village of Bezsonovo, with thirty-five souls of the male, and seventy-six of the female sex, and twenty-eight acres and a half of useless land on the waste of Kolobrodova, no record of serfs for which could be found among the deceased's deeds. The deceased had, it must be confessed, ruined himself in a very strange way: 'provident management' had been his destruction. According to his notions, a nobleman ought not to depend on merchants, townsmen, and 'brigands' of that sort,

as he called them; he set up all possible trades and crafts on his estate; 'it's both seemlier and cheaper,' he used to say: 'it's provident management'! He never relinquished this fatal idea to the end of his days; indeed, it was his ruin. But, then, what entertainment it gave him! He never denied himself the satisfaction of a single whim. Among other freaks, he once began building, after his own fancy, so immense a family coach that, in spite of the united efforts of the peasants' horses, drawn together from the whole village, as well as their owners, it came to grief and fell to pieces on the first hillside. Eremey Lukitch (the name of Panteley's father was Eremey Lukitch), ordered a memorial to be put up on the hillside, but was not, however, at all abashed over the affair. He conceived the happy thought, too, of building a church —by himself, of course—without the assistance of an architect. He burnt a whole forest in making the bricks, laid an immense foundation, as though for a provincial hall, raised the walls, and began putting on the cupola; the cupola fell down. He tried again—the cupola again broke down; he tried the third time—the cupola fell to pieces a third time. Good Eremey Lukitch grew thoughtful; there was something uncanny about it, he reflected . . . some accursed witchcraft must have a hand in it . . . and at once he gave orders to flog all the old women in the village. They flogged the old women; but they didn't get the cupola on, for all that. He began reconstructing the peasants'

huts on a new plan, and all on a system of 'provident management'; he set them three homesteads together in a triangle, and in the middle stuck up a post with a painted bird-cage and flag. Every day he invented some new freak; at one time he was making soup of burdocks, at another cutting his horses' tails off to make caps for his servants; at another, proposing to substitute nettles for flax, to feed pigs on mushrooms. . . . He had once read in the *Moscow Gazette* an article by a Harkov landowner, Hryak-Hrupyorsky, on the importance of morality to the well-being of the peasant, and the next day he gave forth a decree to all his peasants to learn off the Harkov landowner's article by heart at once. The peasants learnt the article; the master asked them whether they understood what was said in it? The bailiff replied—that to be sure they understood it! About the same time he ordered all his subjects, with a view to the maintenance of order and provident management, to be numbered, and each to have his number sewn on his collar. On meeting the master, each was to shout, 'Number so-and-so is here!' and the master would answer affably: 'Go on, in God's name!'

In spite, however, of order and provident management, Eremey Lukitch got by degrees into a very difficult position; he began at first by mortgaging his villages, and then was brought to the sale of them; the last ancestral home, the village with the unfinished church, was sold at last for

arrears to the Crown, luckily not in the lifetime of Eremey Lukitch—he could never have supported such a blow—but a fortnight after his death. He succeeded in dying at home in his own bed, surrounded by his own people, and under the care of his own doctor; but nothing was left to poor Panteley but Bezsonovo.

Panteley heard of his father's illness while he was still in the service, in the very heat of the 'difficulties' mentioned above. He was only just nineteen. From his earliest childhood he had not left his father's house, and under the guidance of his mother, a very good-natured but perfectly stupid woman, Vassilissa Vassilyevna, he grew up spoilt and conceited. She undertook his education alone; Eremey Lukitch, buried in his economical fancies, had no thoughts to spare for it. It is true, he once punished his son with his own hand for mispronouncing a letter of the alphabet; but Eremey Lukitch had received a cruel and secret blow that day: his best dog had been crushed by a tree. Vassilissa Vassilyevna's efforts in regard Panteley's education did not, however, get beyond one terrific exertion; in the sweat of her brow she engaged him a tutor, one Birkopf, a retired Alsatian soldier, and to the day of her death she trembled like a leaf before him. 'Oh,' she thought, 'if he throws us up—I'm lost! Where could I turn? Where could I find another teacher? Why, with what pains, what pains I enticed this one away from our neighbours!' And Birkopf, like a

shrewd man, promptly took advantage of his unique position; he drank like a fish, and slept from morning till night. On the completion of his 'course of science,' Panteley entered the army. Vassilissa Vassilyevna was no more; she had died six months before that important event, of fright. She had had a dream of a white figure riding on a bear. Eremey Lukitch soon followed his better half.

At the first news of his illness, Panteley galloped home at breakneck speed, but he did not find his father alive. What was the amazement of the dutiful son when he found himself, utterly unexpectedly, transformed from a rich heir to a poor man! Few men are capable of bearing so sharp a reverse well. Panteley was embittered, made misanthropical by it. From an honest, generous, good-natured fellow, though spoilt and hot-tempered, he became haughty and quarrelsome; he gave up associating with the neighbours—he was too proud to visit the rich, and he disdained the poor—and behaved with unheard of arrogance to everyone, even to the established authorities. 'I am of the ancient hereditary nobility,' he would say. Once he had been on the point of shooting the police-commissioner for coming into the room with his cap on his head. Of course the authorities, on their side, had their revenge, and took every opportunity to make him feel their power; but still, they were rather afraid of him, because he had a desperate temper, and would propose a duel with knives at

the second word. At the slightest retort Tchertop-hanov's eyes blazed, his voice broke. . . . Ah, er—er—er,' he stammered, 'damn my soul!' . . . and nothing could stop him. And, moreover, he was a man of stainless character, who had never had a hand in anything the least shady. No one, of course, visited him . . . and with all this he was a good-hearted, even a great-hearted man in his own way; acts of injustice, of oppression, he would not brook even against strangers; he stood up for his own peasants like a rock. 'What?' he would say, with a violent blow on his own head: 'touch my people, mine? My name's not Tchertop-hanov, if I . . .'

Tihon Ivanitch Nedopyuskin could not, like Panteley Eremyitch, pride himself on his origin. His father came of the peasant proprietor class, and only after forty years of service attained the rank of a noble. Mr. Nedopyuskin, the father, belonged to the number of those people who are pursued by misfortune with an obduracy akin to personal hatred. For sixty whole years, from his very birth to his very death, the poor man was struggling with all the hardships, calamities, and privations, incidental to people of small means; he struggled like a fish under the ice, never having enough food and sleep—cringing, worrying, wearing himself to exhaustion, fretting over every farthing, with genuine 'innocence' suffering in the service, and dying at last in either a garret or a cellar, in the unsuccessful struggle to gain for him-

self or his children a crust of dry bread. Fate had hunted him down like a hare.

He was a good-natured and honest man, though he did take bribes—from a threepenny bit up to a crown piece inclusive. Nedopyuskin had a wife, thin and consumptive; he had children too; luckily they all died young except Tihon and a daughter, Mitrodora, nicknamed 'the merchants' belle,' who, after many painful and ludicrous adventures, was married to a retired attorney. Mr. Nedopyuskin had succeeded before his death in getting Tihon a place as supernumerary clerk in some office; but directly after his father's death Tihon resigned his situation. Their perpetual anxieties, their heartrending struggle with cold and hunger, his mother's careworn depression, his father's toiling despair, the coarse aggressiveness of landladies and shopkeepers—all the unending daily suffering of their life had developed an exaggerated timidity in Tihon: at the mere sight of his chief he was faint and trembling like a captured bird. He threw up his office. Nature, in her indifference, or perhaps her irony, implants in people all sorts of faculties and tendencies utterly inconsistent with their means and their position in society; with her characteristic care and love she had moulded of Tihon, the son of a poor clerk, a sensuous, indolent, soft, impressionable creature—a creature fitted exclusively for enjoyment, gifted with an excessively delicate sense of smell and of taste . . . she had moulded him, finished him off

most carefully, and set her creation to struggle up on sour cabbage and putrid fish! And, behold! the creation did struggle up somehow, and began what is called 'life.' Then the fun began. Fate, which had so ruthlessly tormented Nedopyuskin the father, took to the son too; she had a taste for them, one must suppose. But she treated Tihon on a different plan: she did not torture him; she played with him. She did not once drive him to desperation, she did not set him to suffer the degrading agonies of hunger, but she led him a dance through the whole of Russia from one end to the other, from one degrading and ludicrous position to another; at one time Fate made him 'majordomo' to a snappish, choleric Lady Bountiful, at another a humble parasite on a wealthy skinflint merchant, then a private secretary to a goggle-eyed gentleman, with his hair cut in the English style, then she promoted him to the post of something between butler and buffoon to a dog-fancier. . . . In short, Fate drove poor Tihon to drink drop by drop to the dregs the bitter poisoned cup of a dependent existence. He had been, in his time, the sport of the dull malignity and the boorish pranks of slothful masters. How often, alone in his room, released at last 'to go in peace,' after a mob of visitors had glutted their taste for horseplay at his expense, he had vowed, blushing with shame, chill tears of despair in his eyes, that he would run away in secret, would try his luck in the town, would find himself some little place as

clerk, or die once for all of hunger in the street! But, in the first place, God had not given him strength of character; secondly, his timidity unhinged him; and thirdly, how could he get himself a place? whom could he ask? 'They'll never give it me,' the luckless wretch would murmur, tossing wearily in his bed, 'they'll never give it me!' And the next day he would take up the same degrading life again. His position was the more painful that, with all her care, nature had not troubled to give him the smallest share of the gifts and qualifications without which the trade of a buffoon is almost impossible. He was not equal, for instance, to dancing till he dropped, in a bearskin coat turned inside out, nor making jokes and cutting capers in the immediate vicinity of cracking whips; if he was turned out in a state of nature into a temperature of twenty degrees below freezing, as often as not, he caught cold; his stomach could not digest brandy mixed with ink and other filth, nor minced funguses and toadstools in vinegar. There is no knowing what would have become of Tihon if the last of his patrons, a contractor who had made his fortune, had not taken it into his head in a merry hour to inscribe in his will: 'And to Zyozo (Tihon, to wit) Nedopyuskin, I leave in perpetual possession, to him and his heirs, the village of Bezselendyevka, lawfully acquired by me, with all its appurtenances.' A few days later this patron was taken with a fit of apoplexy after gorging on sturgeon soup. A great commotion

followed; the officials came and put seals on the property.

The relations arrived; the will was opened and read; and they called for Nedopyuskin: Nedopyuskin made his appearance. The greater number of the party knew the nature of Tihon Ivanitch's duties in his patron's household; he was greeted with deafening shouts and ironical congratulations. 'The landowner; here is the new owner!' shouted the other heirs. 'Well, really this,' put in one, a noted wit and humourist; 'well, really this, one may say . . . this positively is . . . really what one may call . . . an heir-apparent!' and they all went off into shrieks. For a long while Nedopyuskin could not believe in his good fortune. They showed him the will: he flushed, shut his eyes, and with a despairing gesture he burst into tears. The chuckles of the party passed into a deep unanimous roar. The village of Bezselendyevka consisted of only twenty-two serfs, no one regretted its loss keenly; so why not get some fun out of it? One of the heirs from Petersburg, an important man, with a Greek nose and a majestic expression of face, Rostislav Adamitch Shtoppel, went so far as to go up to Nedopyuskin and look haughtily at him over his shoulder. 'So far as I can gather, honoured sir,' he observed with contemptuous carelessness, 'you enjoyed your position in the household of our respected Fedor Fedoritch, owing to your obliging readiness to wait on his diversions?' The gentleman from Petersburg

expressed himself in a style insufferably refined, smart, and correct. Nedopyuskin, in his agitation and confusion, had not taken in the unknown gentleman's words, but the others were all quiet at once; the wit smiled condescendingly. Mr. Shtoppel rubbed his hands and repeated his question. Nedopyuskin raised his eyes in bewilderment and opened his mouth. Rostislav Adamitch puckered his face up sarcastically.

'I congratulate you, my dear sir, I congratulate you,' he went on: 'it's true, one may say, not everyone would have consented to gain his daily bread in such a fashion; but *de gustibus non est disputandum*, that is, everyone to his taste. . . . Eh?'

Someone at the back uttered a rapid, decorous shriek of admiration and delight.

'Tell us,' pursued Mr. Shtoppel, much encouraged by the smiles of the whole party, 'to what special talent are you indebted for your good-fortune? No, don't be bashful, tell us; we're all here, so to speak, *en famille*. Aren't we, gentlemen, all here *en famille*?'

The relation to whom Rostislav Adamitch chanced to turn with this question did not, unfortunately, know French, and so he confined himself to a faint grunt of approbation. But another relation, a young man, with patches of a yellow colour on his forehead, hastened to chime in, 'Wee, wee, to be sure.'

'Perhaps,' Mr. Shtoppel began again, 'you can

walk on your hands, your legs raised, so to say, in the air?'

Nedopyuskin looked round in agony: every face wore a taunting smile, every eye was moist with delight.

'Or perhaps you can crow like a cock?'

A loud guffaw broke out on all sides, and was hushed at once, stifled by expectation.

'Or perhaps on your nose you can. . . .'

'Stop that!' a loud harsh voice suddenly interrupted Rostislav Adamitch; 'I wonder you're not ashamed to torment the poor man!'

Everyone looked round. In the doorway stood Tchertop-hanov. As a cousin four times removed of the deceased contractor, he too had received a note of invitation to the meeting of the relations. During the whole time of reading the will he had kept, as he always did, haughtily apart from the others.

'Stop that!' he repeated, throwing his head back proudly.

Mr. Shtoppel turned round quickly, and seeing a poorly dressed, unattractive-looking man, he inquired of his neighbour in an undertone (caution's always a good thing):

'Who's that?'

'Tchertop-hanov—he's no great shakes,' the latter whispered in his ear.

Rostislav Adamitch assumed a haughty air.

'And who are you to give orders?' he said through his nose, drooping his eyelids scornfully;

'who may you be, allow me to inquire?—a queer fish, upon my word!'

Tchertop-hanov exploded like gunpowder at a spark. He was choked with fury.

'Ss—ss—ss!' he hissed like one possessed, and all at once he thundered: 'Who am I? Who am I? I'm Panteley Tchertop-hanov, of the ancient hereditary nobility; my forefathers served the Tsar: and who may you be?'

Rostislav Adamitch turned pale and stepped back. He had not expected such resistance.

'I—I—a fish indeed!'

Tcherop-hanov darted forward; Shtoppel bounded away in great perturbation, the others rushed to meet the exasperated nobleman.

'A duel, a duel, a duel, at once, across a handkerchief!' shouted the enraged Panteley, 'or beg my pardon—yes, and his too . . .'

'Pray beg his pardon!' the agitated relations muttered all round Shtoppel; 'he's such a madman, he'd cut your throat in a minute!'

'I beg your pardon, I beg your pardon, I didn't know,' stammered Shtoppel; 'I didn't know . . .'

'And beg his too!' vociferated the implacable Panteley.

'I beg your pardon too,' added Rostislav Adamitch, addressing Nedopyuskin, who was shaking as if he were in an ague.

Tchertop-hanov calmed down; he went up to Tihon Ivanitch, took him by the hand, looked fiercely round, and, as not one pair of eyes ventured

to meet his, he walked triumphantly amid profound silence out of the room, with the new owner of the lawfully acquired village of Bezselendyevka.

From that day they never parted again. (The village of Bezselendyevka was only seven miles from Bezsonovo.) The boundless gratitude of Nedopyuskin soon passed into the most adoring veneration. The weak, soft, and not perfectly stainless Tihon bowed down in the dust before the fearless and irreproachable Panteley. 'It's no slight thing,' he thought to himself sometimes, 'to talk to the governor, look him straight in the face. . . . Christ have mercy on us, doesn't he look at him!'

He marvelled at him, he exhausted all the force of his soul in his admiration of him, he regarded him as an extraordinary man, as clever, as learned. And there's no denying that, bad as Tchertop-hanov's education might be, still, in comparison with Tihon's education, it might pass for brilliant. Tchertop-hanov, it is true, had read little Russian, and knew French very badly—so badly that once, in reply to the question of a Swiss tutor: '*Vous parlez français, monsieur?*' he answered: '*Je ne comprehend*,' and after a moment's thought, he added *pa* ; but any way he was aware that Voltaire had once existed, and was a very witty writer, and that Frederick the Great, king of Prussia, had been distinguished as a great military commander. Of Russian writers he respected Derzhavin, but liked Marlinsky, and called Ammalat-Bek the best of the pack. . . .

A few days after my first meeting with the two friends, I set off for the village of Bezsonovo to see Panteley Eremyitch. His little house could be seen a long way off; it stood out on a bare place, half a mile from the village, on the 'bluff,' as it is called, like a hawk on a ploughed field. Tchertop-hanov's homestead consisted of nothing more than four old tumble-down buildings of different sizes—that is, a lodge, a stable, a barn, and a bath-house. Each building stood apart by itself; there was neither a fence round nor a gate to be seen. My coachman stopped in perplexity at a well which was choked up and had almost disappeared. Near the barn some thin and unkempt puppies were mangling a dead horse, probably Orbassan; one of them lifted up the bleeding nose, barked hurriedly, and again fell to devouring the bare ribs. Near the horse stood a boy of seventeen, with a puffy, yellow face, dressed like a Cossack, and barelegged; he looked with a responsible air at the dogs committed to his charge, and now and then gave the greediest a lash with his whip.

'Is your master at home?' I inquired.

'The Lord knows!' answered the lad; 'you'd better knock.'

I jumped out of the droshky, and went up to the steps of the lodge.

Mr. Tchertop-hanov's dwelling presented a very cheerless aspect; the beams were blackened and bulging forward, the chimney had fallen off, the corners of the house were stained with damp, and

sunk out of the perpendicular, the small, dusty, bluish windows peeped out from under the shaggy overhanging roof with an indescribably morose expression: some old vagrants have eyes that look like that. I knocked; no one responded. I could hear, however, through the door some sharply uttered words:

'A, B, C; there now, idiot!' a hoarse voice was saying: 'A, B, C, D . . . no! D, E, E, E! . . . Now then, idiot!'

I knocked a second time.

The same voice shouted: 'Come in; who's there?' . . .

I went into the small empty hall, and through the open door I saw Tchertop-hanov himself. In a greasy oriental dressing-gown, loose trousers, and a red skull-cap, he was sitting on a chair; in one hand he gripped the face of a young poodle, while in the other he was holding a piece of bread just above his nose.

'Ah!' he pronounced with dignity, not stirring from his seat: 'delighted to see you. Please sit down. I am busy here with Venzor. . . . Tihon Ivanitch,' he added, raising his voice, 'come here, will you? Here's a visitor.'

'I'm coming, I'm coming,' Tihon Ivanitch responded from the other room. 'Masha, give me my cravat.'

Tchertop-hanov turned to Venzor again and laid the piece of bread on his nose. I looked round. Except an extending table much warped

with thirteen legs of unequal length, and four rush chairs worn into hollows, there was no furniture of any kind in the room; the walls, which had been washed white, ages ago, with blue, star-shaped spots, were peeling off in many places; between the windows hung a broken tarnished looking-glass in a huge frame of red wood. In the corners stood pipestands and guns; from the ceiling hung fat black cobwebs.

'A, B, C, D,' Tchertop-hanov repeated slowly, and suddenly he cried furiously: '*E! E! E! E!* . . What a stupid brute! . . .'

But the luckless poodle only shivered, and could not make up his mind to open his mouth; he still sat wagging his tail uneasily and wrinkling up his face, blinked dejectedly, and frowned as though saying to himself: 'Of course, it's just as you please!'

'There, eat! come! take it!' repeated the indefatigable master.

'You've frightened him,' I remarked.

'Well, he can get along, then!'

He gave him a kick. The poor dog got up softly, dropped the bread off his nose, and walked, as it were, on tiptoe to the hall, deeply wounded. And with good reason: a stranger calling for the first time, and to treat him like that!

The door from the next room gave a subdued creak, and Mr. Nedopyuskin came in, affably bowing and smiling.

I got up and bowed.

'Don't disturb yourself, don't disturb yourself,' he lisped.

We sat down. Tchertop-hanov went into the next room.

'You have been for some time in our neighbourhood,' began Nedopyuskin in a subdued voice, coughing discreetly into his hand, and holding his fingers before his lips from a feeling of propriety.

'I came last month.'

'Indeed.'

We were silent for a little.

'Lovely weather we are having just now,' resumed Nedopyuskin, and he looked gratefully at me as though I were in some way responsible for the weather: 'the corn, one may say, is doing wonderfully.'

I nodded in token of assent. We were silent again.

'Panteley Eremyitch was pleased to hunt two hares yesterday,' Nedopyuskin began again with an effort, obviously wishing to enliven the conversation; 'yes, indeed, very big hares they were, sir.'

'Has Mr. Tchertop-hanov good hounds?'

'The most wonderful hounds, sir!' Nedopyuskin replied, delighted; 'one may say, the best in the province, indeed.' (He drew nearer to me.) 'But, then, Panteley Eremyitch is such a wonderful man! He has only to wish for anything—he has only to take an idea into his head—and before you can look round, it's done; everything,

you may say, goes like clockwork. Panteley Eremyitch, I assure you . . .'

Tchertop-hanov came into the room. Nedopyuskin smiled, ceased speaking, and indicated him to me with a glance which seemed to say, 'There, you will see for yourself.' We fell to talking about hunting.

'Would you like me to show you my leash?' Tchertop-hanov asked me; and, not waiting for a reply, he called Karp.

A sturdy lad came in, in a green nankin long coat, with a blue collar and livery buttons.

'Tell Fomka,' said Tchertop-hanov abruptly, 'to bring in Ammalat and Saiga, and in good order, do you understand?'

Karp gave a broad grin, uttered an indefinite sound, and went away. Fomka made his appearance, well combed and tightly buttoned up, in boots, and with the hounds. From politeness, I admired the stupid beasts (harriers are all exceedingly stupid). Tchertop-hanov spat right into Ammalat's nostrils, which did not, however, apparently afford that dog the slightest satisfaction. Nedopyuskin, too, stroked Ammalat from behind. We began chatting again. By degrees Tchertop-hanov unbent completely, and no longer stood on his dignity nor snorted defiantly; the expression of his face changed. He glanced at me and at Nedopyuskin. . . .

'Hey!' he cried suddenly; 'why should she sit in there alone? Masha! hi, Masha! come in here!'

Some one stirred in the next room, but there was no answer.

'Ma-a-sha!' Tchertop-hanov repeated caressingly; 'come in here. It's all right, don't be afraid.'

The door was softly opened, and I caught sight of a tall and slender girl of twenty, with a dark gypsy face, golden-brown eyes, and hair black as pitch; her large white teeth gleamed between full red lips. She had on a white dress; a blue shawl, pinned close round her throat with a gold brooch, half hid her slender, beautiful arms, in which one could see the fineness of her race. She took two steps with the bashful awkwardness of some wild creature, stood still, and looked down.

'Come, let me introduce,' said Panteley Eremyitch; 'wife she is not, but she's to be respected as a wife.'

Masha flushed slightly, and smiled in confusion. I made her a low bow. I thought her very charming. The delicate falcon nose, with distended, half-transparent nostrils; the bold sweep of her high eyebrows, the pale, almost sunken cheeks—every feature of her face denoted wilful passion and reckless devilry. From under the coil of her hair two rows of little shining hairs ran down her broad neck—a sign of race and vigour.

She went to the window and sat down. I did not want to increase her embarrassment, and began talking with Tchertop-hanov. Masha turned

her head slyly, and began peeping from under her eyelids at me stealthily, shyly, and swiftly. Her glance seemed to flash out like a snake's sting. Nedopyuskin sat beside her, and whispered something in her ear. She smiled again. When she smiled, her nose slightly puckered up, and her upper lip was raised, which gave her face something of the expression of a cat or a lion. . . .

'Oh, but you're one of the "hands off!" sort,' I thought, in my turn stealing a look at her supple frame, her hollow breast, and her quick, angular movements.

'Masha,' Tchertop-hanov asked, 'don't you think we ought to give our visitor some entertainment, eh?'

'We've got some jam,' she replied.

'Well, bring the jam here, and some vodka, too, while you're about it. And, I say, Masha,' he shouted after her, 'bring the guitar in too.'

'What's the guitar for? I'm not going to sing.'

'Why?'

'I don't want to.'

'Oh, nonsense; you'll want to when . . .'

'What?' asked Masha, rapidly knitting her brows.

'When you're asked,' Tchertop-hanov went on, with some embarrassment.

'Oh!'

She went out, soon came back with jam and vodka, and again sat by the window. There was

still a line to be seen on her forehead; the two eyebrows rose and drooped like a wasp's antennæ. . . . Have you ever noticed, reader, what a wicked face the wasp has? 'Well,' I thought, 'I 'm in for a storm.' The conversation flagged. Nedopyuskin shut up completely, and wore a forced smile; Tchertop-hanov panted, turned red, and opened his eyes wide; I was on the point of taking leave. . . . Suddenly Masha got up, flung open the window, thrust out her head, and shouted lustily to a passing peasant woman, 'Aksinya!' The woman started, and tried to turn round, but slipped down and flopped heavily on to a dung-heap. Masha threw herself back and laughed merrily; Tchertop-hanov laughed too; Nedopyuskin shrieked with delight. We all revived. The storm had passed off in one flash of lightning . . . the air was clear again.

Half-an-hour later, no one would have recognised us; we were chatting and frolicking like children. Masha was the merriest of all; Tchertop-hanov simply could not take his eyes off her. Her face grew paler, her nostrils dilated, her eyes glowed and darkened at the same time. It was a wild creature at play. Nedopyuskin limped after her on his short, fat little legs, like a drake after a duck. Even Venzor crawled out of his hiding-place in the hall, stood a moment in the doorway, glanced at us, and suddenly fell to jumping up into the air and barking. Masha flitted into the other room, fetched the guitar, flung off the shawl

from her shoulders, seated herself quickly, and, raising her head, began singing a gypsy song. Her voice rang out, vibrating like a glass bell when it is struck; it flamed up and died away. . . . It filled the heart with sweetness and pain. . . . Tchertop-hanov fell to dancing. Nedopyuskin stamped and swung his legs in tune. Masha was all a-quiver, like birch-bark in the fire; her delicate fingers flew playfully over the guitar, her dark-skinned throat slowly heaved under the two rows of amber. All at once she would cease singing, sink into exhaustion, and twang the guitar, as it were involuntarily, and Tchertop-hanov stood still, merely working his shoulders and turning round in one place, while Nedopyuskin nodded his head like a Chinese figure; then she would break out into song like a mad thing, drawing herself up and holding up her head, and Tchertop-hanov again curtsied down to the ground, leaped up to the ceiling, spun round like a top, crying 'Quicker! . . .'

'Quicker, quicker, quicker!' Nedopyuskin chimed in, speaking very fast.

It was late in the evening when I left Bezsonovo. . . .

XXII

THE END OF TCHERTOP-HANOV

I

It was two years after my visit that Panteley Eremyitch's troubles began—his real troubles. Disappointments, disasters, even misfortunes he had had before that time, but he had paid no attention to them, and had risen superior to them in former days. The first blow that fell upon him was the most heartrending for him. Masha left him.

What induced her to forsake his roof, where she seemed to be so thoroughly at home, it is hard to say. Tchertop-hanov to the end of his days clung to the conviction that a certain young neighbour, a retired captain of Uhlans, named Yaff, was at the root of Masha's desertion. He had taken her fancy, according to Panteley Eremyitch, simply by constantly curling his moustaches, pomading himself to excess, and sniggering significantly; but one must suppose that the vagrant gypsy blood in Masha's veins had more to do with it. However that may have been, one fine summer evening

Masha tied up a few odds and ends in a small bundle, and walked out of Tchertop-hanov's house.

For three days before this she had sat crouched up in a corner, huddled against the wall, like a wounded fox, and had not spoken a word to any one; she had only turned her eyes about, and twitched her eyebrows, and faintly gnashed her teeth, and moved her arms as though she were wrapping herself up. This mood had come upon her before, but had never lasted long: Tchertop-hanov knew that, and so he neither worried himself nor worried her. But when, on coming in from the kennels, where, in his huntsman's words, the last two hounds 'had departed,' he met a servant girl who, in a trembling voice, informed him that Marya Akinfyevna sent him her greetings, and left word that she wished him every happiness, but she was not coming back to him any more; Tchertop-hanov, after reeling round where he stood and uttering a hoarse yell, rushed at once after the runaway, snatching up his pistol as he went.

He overtook her a mile and a half from his house, near a birch wood, on the high-road to the district town. The sun was sinking on the horizon, and everything was suddenly suffused with purple glow—trees, plants, and earth alike.

'To Yaff! to Yaff!' groaned Tchertop-hanov directly he caught sight of Masha. 'Going to Yaff!' he repeated, running up to her, and almost stumbling at every step.

Masha stood still, and turned round facing him.

She stood with her back to the light, and looked all black, as though she had been carved out of dark wood; only the whites of her eyes stood out like silvery almonds, but the eyes themselves—the pupils—were darker than ever.

She flung her bundle aside, and folded her arms.

'You are going to Yaff, wretched girl!' repeated Tchertop-hanov, and he was on the point of seizing her by the shoulder, but, meeting her eyes, he was abashed, and stood uneasily where he was.

'I am not going to Mr. Yaff, Panteley Eremyitch,' replied Masha in soft, even tones; 'it's only I can't live with you any longer.'

'Can't live with me? Why not? Have I offended you in some way?'

Masha shook her head. 'You've not offended me in any way, Panteley Eremyitch, only my heart is heavy in your house. . . . Thanks for the past, but I can't stay—no!'

Tchertop-hanov was amazed; he positively slapped his thighs, and bounced up and down in his astonishment.

'How is that? Here she's gone on living with me, and known nothing but peace and happiness, and all of a sudden—her heart's heavy! and she flings me over! She goes and puts a kerchief on her head, and is gone. She received every respect, like any lady.'

'I don't care for that in the least,' Masha interrupted.

'Don't care for it? From a wandering gypsy

to turn into a lady, and she doesn't care for it! How don't you care for it, you low-born slave? Do you expect me to believe that? There's treachery hidden in it—treachery!'

He began frowning again.

'There's no treachery in my thoughts, and never has been,' said Masha in her distinct, resonant voice; 'I've told you already, my heart was heavy.'

'Masha!' cried Tchertop-hanov, striking himself a blow on the chest with his fist; 'there, stop it; hush, you have tortured me . . . now, it's enough! O my God! think only what Tisha will say; you might have pity on him, at least!'

'Remember me to Tihon Ivanitch, and tell him . . .'

Tchertop-hanov wrung his hands. 'No, you are talking nonsense—you are not going! Your Yaff may wait for you in vain!'

'Mr. Yaff,' Masha was beginning. . . .

'A fine *Mister* Yaff!' Tchertop-hanov mimicked her. 'He's an underhand rascal, a low cur—that's what he is—and a phiz like an ape's!'

For fully half-an-hour Tchertop-hanov was struggling with Masha. He came close to her, he fell back, he shook his fists at her, he bowed down before her, he wept, he scolded.

. . . 'I can't,' repeated Masha; 'I am so sad at heart . . . devoured by weariness.'

Little by little her face assumed such an indifferent, almost drowsy expression, that Tchertop-

hanov asked her if they had not drugged her with laudanum.

'It's weariness,' she said for the tenth time.

'Then what if I kill you?' he cried suddenly, and he pulled the pistol out of his pocket.

Masha smiled; her face brightened.

'Well, kill me, Panteley Eremyitch; as you will; but go back, I won't.'

'You won't come back?' Tchertop-hanov cocked the pistol.

'I won't go back, my dearie. Never in my life will I go back. My word is steadfast.'

Tchertop-hanov suddenly thrust the pistol into her hand, and sat down on the ground.

'Then, you kill me! Without you I don't care to live. I have grown loathsome to you—and everything's loathsome for me!'

Masha bent down, took up her bundle, laid the pistol on the grass, its mouth away from Tchertop-hanov, and went up to him.

'Ah, my dearie, why torture yourself? Don't you know what we gypsy girls are? It's our nature; you must make up your mind to it. When there comes weariness the divider, and calls the soul away to strange, distant parts, how is one to stay here? Don't forget your Masha; you won't find such another sweetheart, and I won't forget you, my dearie; but our life together's over!'

'I loved you, Masha,' Tchertop-hanov muttered into the fingers in which he had buried his face....

'And I loved you, little friend Panteley Eremyitch.'

'I love you, I love you madly, senselessly—and when I think now that you, in your right senses, without rhyme or reason, are leaving me like this, and going to wander over the face of the earth—well, it strikes me that if I weren't a poor penniless devil, you wouldn't be throwing me over!'

At these words Masha only laughed.

'And he used to say I didn't care for money,' she commented, and she gave Tchertop-hanov a vigorous thump on the shoulder.

He jumped up on to his feet.

'Come, at least you must let me give you some money—how can you go like this without a halfpenny? But best of all: kill me! I tell you plainly: kill me once for all!'

Masha shook her head again. 'Kill you? Why get sent to Siberia, my dearie?'

Tchertop-hanov shuddered. 'Then it's only from that—from fear of penal servitude.'

He rolled on the grass again.

Masha stood over him in silence. 'I'm sorry for you, dear,' she said with a sigh: 'you're a good fellow . . . but there's no help for it: good-bye!'

She turned away and took two steps. The night had come on by now, and dim shadows were closing in on all sides. Tchertop-hanov jumped up swiftly and seized Masha from behind by her two elbows.

'You are going away like this, serpent, to Yaff!'

'Good-bye!' Masha repeated sharply and significantly; she tore herself away and walked off.

Tchertop-hanov looked after her, ran to the place where the pistol was lying, snatched it up, took aim, fired. . . . But before he touched the trigger, his arm twitched upwards; the ball whistled over Masha's head. She looked at him over her shoulder without stopping, and went on, swinging as she walked, as though in defiance of him.

He hid his face—and fell to running.

But before he had run fifty paces he suddenly stood still as though turned to stone. A well-known, too well-known voice came floating to him. Masha was singing. 'It was in the sweet days of youth,' she sang: every note seemed to linger plaintive and ardent in the evening air. Tchertop-hanov listened intently. The voice retreated and retreated; at one moment it died away, at the next it floated across, hardly audible, but still with the same passionate glow.

'She does it to spite me,' thought Tchertop-hanov; but at once he moaned, 'oh, no! it's her last farewell to me for ever,'—and he burst into floods of tears.

. . . . . .

The next day he appeared at the lodgings of Mr. Yaff, who, as a true man of the world, not liking the solitude of the country, resided in the

district town, 'to be nearer the young ladies,' as he expressed it. Tchertop-hanov did not find Yaff; he had, in the words of his valet, set off for Moscow the evening before.

'Then it is so!' cried Tchertop-hanov furiously; 'there was an arrangement between them; she has run away with him . . . but wait a bit!'

He broke into the young cavalry captain's room in spite of the resistance of the valet. In the room there was hanging over the sofa a portrait in oils of the master, in the Uhlan uniform. 'Ah, here you are, you tailless ape!' thundered Tchertop-hanov; he jumped on to the sofa, and with a blow of his fist burst a big hole in the taut canvas.

'Tell your worthless master,' he turned to the valet, 'that, in the absence of his own filthy phiz, the nobleman Tchertop-hanov put a hole through the painted one; and if he cares for satisfaction from me, he knows where to find the nobleman Tchertop-hanov! or else I 'll find him out myself! I 'll fetch the rascally ape from the bottom of the sea!'

Saying these words, Tchertop-hanov jumped off the sofa and majestically withdrew.

But the cavalry captain Yaff did not demand satisfaction from him—indeed, he never met him anywhere—and Tchertop-hanov did not think of seeking his enemy out, and no scandal followed. Masha herself soon after this disappeared beyond all trace. Tchertop-hanov took to drink; how-

ever, he 'reformed' later. But then a second blow fell upon him.

II

This was the death of his bosom friend Tihon Ivanovitch Nedopyuskin. His health had begun to fail two years before his death: he began to suffer from asthma, and was constantly dropping asleep, and on waking up could not at once come to himself; the district doctor maintained that this was the result of 'something rather like fits.' During the three days which preceded Masha's departure, those three days when 'her heart was heavy,' Nedopyuskin had been away at his own place at Bezselendyevka: he had been laid up with a severe cold. Masha's conduct was consequently even more unexpected for him; it made almost a deeper impression on him than on Tchertop-hanov himself. With his natural sweetness and diffidence, he gave utterance to nothing but the tenderest sympathy with his friend, and the most painful perplexity . . . but it crushed and made havoc of everything in him. 'She has torn the heart out of me,' he would murmur to himself, as he sat on his favourite checked sofa and twisted his fingers. Even when Tchertop-hanov had got over it, he, Nedopyuskin, did not recover, and still felt that 'there was a void within him.' 'Here,' he would say, pointing to the middle of his breast above his stomach. In that way he lingered on till the

winter. When the frosts came, his asthma got better, but he was visited by, not 'something rather like a fit' this time, but a real unmistakable fit. He did not lose his memory at once: he still knew Tchertop-hanov and his friend's cry of despair, 'How can you desert me, Tisha, without my consent, just as Masha did?' He even responded with faltering, uncertain tongue, 'O—P—a—ey—E—e—yitch, I will o—bey you.'

This did not, however, prevent him from dying the same day, without waiting for the district doctor, who (on seeing the hardly cold body) found nothing left for him to do, but with a melancholy recognition of the instability of all things mortal, to ask for 'a drop of vodka and a snack of fish.' As might have been anticipated, Tihon Ivanitch had bequeathed his property to his revered patron and generous protector, Panteley Eremyitch Tchertop-hanov; but it was of no great benefit to the revered patron, as it was shortly after sold by public auction, partly in order to cover the expense of a sepulchral monument, a statue, which Tchertop-hanov (and one can see his father's craze coming out in him here) had thought fit to put up over the ashes of his friend. This statue, which was to have represented an angel praying, was ordered by him from Moscow; but the agent recommended to him, conceiving that connoisseurs in sculpture were not often to be met with in the provinces, sent him, instead of an angel, a goddess Flora, which had for many years adorned

one of those neglected gardens near Moscow, laid out in the days of Catherine. He had an excellent reason for doing so, since this statue, though highly artistic, in the rococo style, with plump little arms, tossing curls, a wreath of roses round the bare bosom, and a serpentine figure, was obtained by him, the agent, for nothing. And so to this day the mythological goddess stands, with one foot elegantly lifted, above the tomb of Tihon Ivanovitch, and with a genuinely Pompadour simper, gazes at the calves and sheep, those invariable visitors of our village graveyards, as they stray about her.

III

On the loss of his faithful friend, Tchertop-hanov again took to drink, and this time far more seriously. Everything went utterly to the bad with him. He had no money left for sport; the last of his meagre fortune was spent; the last of his few servants ran away. Panteley Eremyitch's isolation became complete: he had no one to speak a word to even, far less to open his heart to. His pride alone had suffered no diminution. On the contrary, the worse his surroundings became, the more haughty and lofty and inaccessible he was himself. He became a complete misanthrope in the end. One distraction, one delight, was left him: a superb grey horse, of the Don breed, named by him Malek-Adel, a really wonderful animal.

This horse came into his possession in this fashion.

As he was riding one day through a neighbouring village, Tchertop-hanov heard a crowd of peasants shouting and hooting before a tavern. In the middle of the crowd stalwart arms were continually rising and falling in exactly the same place.

'What is happening there?' he asked, in the peremptory tone peculiar to him, of an old peasant woman who was standing on the threshold of her hut. Leaning against the doorpost as though dozing, the old woman stared in the direction of the tavern. A white-headed urchin in a print smock, with a cypress-wood cross on his little bare breast, was sitting with little outstretched legs, and little clenched fists between her bast slippers; a chicken close by was chipping at a stale crust of rye-bread.

'The Lord knows, your honour,' answered the old woman. Bending forward, she laid her wrinkled brown hand on the child's head. 'They say our lads are beating a Jew.'

'A Jew? What Jew?'

'The Lord knows, your honour. A Jew came among us; and where he's come from — who knows? Vassya, come to your mammy, sir; sh, sh, nasty brute!'

The old woman drove away the chicken, while Vassya clung to her petticoat.

'So, you see, they're beating him, sir.'

'Why beating him? What for?'

'I don't know, your honour. No doubt, he deserves it. And, indeed, why not beat him? You know, your honour, he crucified Christ!'

Tchertop-hanov uttered a whoop, gave his horse a lash on the neck with the riding-whip, flew straight towards the crowd, and plunging into it, began with the same riding-whip thrashing the peasants to left and to right indiscriminately, shouting in broken tones: 'Lawless brutes! lawless brutes! It's for the law to punish, and not pri-vate per-sons! The law! the law! the law!'

Before two minutes had passed the crowd had beaten a retreat in various directions; and on the ground before the tavern door could be seen a small, thin, swarthy creature, in a nankin long coat, dishevelled and mangled . . . a pale face, rolling eyes, open mouth. . . . What was it? . . . deadly terror, or death itself?

'Why have you killed this Jew?' Tchertop-hanov shouted at the top of his voice, brandishing his riding-whip menacingly.

The crowd faintly roared in response. One peasant was rubbing his shoulder, another his side, a third his nose.

'You're pretty free with your whip!' was heard in the back rows.

'Why have you killed the Jew, you christened Pagans?' repeated Tchertop-hanov.

But, at this point, the creature lying on the

ground hurriedly jumped on to its feet, and, running up to Tchertop-hanov, convulsively seized hold of the edge of the saddle.

'Alive!' was heard in the background.

'He's a regular cat!'

'Your ex-shelency, defend me, save me!' the unhappy Jew was faltering meanwhile, his whole body squeezed up against Tchertop-hanov's foot; 'or they will murder me, they will murder me, your ex-shelency!'

'What have they against you?' asked Tchertop-hanov.

'I can't tell, so help me God! Some cow hereabouts died . . . so they suspect me . . . but I . . .'

'Well, that we'll go into later!' Tchertop-hanov interrupted; 'but now, you hold on to the saddle and follow me. And you!' he added, turning to the crowd, 'do you know me?—I'm the landowner Panteley Tchertop-hanov. I live at Bezsonovo, —and so you can take proceedings against me, when you think fit—and against the Jew too, while you're about it!'

'Why take proceedings?' said a grey-bearded, decent-looking peasant, bowing low, the very picture of an ancient patriarch. (He had been no whit behind the others in belabouring the Jew, however). 'We know your honour, Panteley Eremyitch, well; we thank your honour humbly for teaching us better!'

'Why take proceedings?' chimed in the others.

'As to the Jew, we'll take it out of him another day! He won't escape us! We shall be on the look-out for him.'

Tchertop-hanov pulled his moustaches, snorted, and went home at a walking pace, accompanied by the Jew, whom he had delivered from his persecutors just as he had once delivered Tihon Nedopyuskin.

IV

A few days later the one groom who was left to Tchertop-hanov announced that someone had come on horseback and wanted to speak to him. Tchertop-hanov went out on to the steps and recognised the Jew, riding a splendid horse of the Don breed, which stood proud and motionless in the middle of the courtyard. The Jew was bareheaded; he held his cap under his arm, and had thrust his feet into the stirrup-straps, not into the stirrups themselves; the ragged skirts of his long coat hung down on both sides of the saddle. On seeing Tchertop-hanov, he gave a smack with his lips, and ducked down with a twitch of the elbows and a bend of the legs. Tchertop-hanov, however, not only failed to respond to his greeting, but was even enraged by it; he was all on fire in a minute: a scurvy Jew dare to ride a magnificent horse like that! . . . It was positively indecent!

'Hi, you Ethiopian fright!' he shouted; 'get

off at once, if you don't want to be flung off into the mud!'

The Jew promptly obeyed, rolled off the horse like a sack, and keeping hold of the rein with one hand, he approached Tchertop-hanov, smiling and bowing.

'What do you want?' Panteley Eremyitch inquired with dignity.

'Your ex-shelency, deign to look what a horse!' said the Jew, never ceasing to bow for an instant.

'Er . . . well . . . the horse is all right. Where did you get it from? Stole it, I suppose?'

'How can you say that, your ex-shelency! I'm an honest Jew. I didn't steal it, but I obtained it for your ex-shelency—really! And the trouble, the trouble I had to get it? But, then, see what a horse it is! There's not another horse like it to be found in all the Don country! Look, your ex-shelency, what a horse it is! Here, kindly step this way! Wo! . . . wo! . . . turn round, stand sideways! And we'll take off the saddle. What do you think of him, your ex-shelency?'

'The horse is all right,' repeated Tchertop-hanov with affected indifference, though his heart was beating like a sledge-hammer in his breast. He was a passionate lover of 'horse-flesh,' and knew a good thing when he saw it.

'Only take a look at him, your ex-shelency! Pat him on the neck! yes, yes, he-he-he-he! like this, like this!'

Tchertop-hanov, with apparent reluctance, laid his hand on the horse's neck, gave it a pat or two, then passed his fingers from the forelock along the spine, and when he had reached a certain spot above the kidneys, like a connoisseur, he lightly pressed that spot. The horse instantly arched its spine, and looking round suspiciously at Tchertop-hanov with its haughty black eye, snorted and moved its hind legs.

The Jew laughed and faintly clapped his hands. 'He knows his master, your ex-shelency, his master!'

'Don't talk nonsense,' Tchertop-hanov interrupted with vexation. 'To buy this horse from you . . . I haven't the means, and as for presents, I not only wouldn't take them from a Jew; I wouldn't take a present from Almighty God Himself!'

'As though I would presume to offer you a present, mercy upon me!' cried the Jew: 'you buy it, your ex-shelency . . . and as to the little sum—I can wait for it.'

Tchertop-hanov sank into thought.

'What will you take for it?' he muttered at last between his teeth.

The Jew shrugged his shoulders.

'What I paid for it myself. Two hundred roubles.'

The horse was well worth twice—perhaps even three times that sum.

Tchertop-havov turned away and yawned feverishly

'And the money . . . when?' he asked, scowling furiously and not looking at the Jew.

'When your ex-shelency thinks fit.'

Tchertop-hanov flung his head back, but did not raise his eyes. 'That's no answer. Speak plainly, son of Herod! Am I to be under an obligation to you, hey?'

'Well, let's say, then,' the Jew hastened to add, 'in six months' time. . . . Do you agree?'

Tchertop-hanov made no reply.

The Jew tried to get a look at his face. 'Do you agree? You permit him to be led to your stable?'

'The saddle I don't want,' Tchertop-hanov blurted out abruptly. 'Take the saddle—do you hear?'

'To be sure, to be sure, I will take it,' faltered the delighted Jew, shouldering the saddle.

'And the money,' Tchertop-hanov pursued . . . 'in six months. And not two hundred, but two hundred and fifty. Not a word! Two hundred and fifty, I tell you! to my account.'

Tchertop-hanov still could not bring himself to raise his eyes. Never had his pride been so cruelly wounded.

'It's plain, it's a present,' was the thought in his mind; 'he's brought it out of gratitude, the devil!' And he would have liked to kiss the Jew, and he would have liked to beat him.

'Your ex-shelency,' began the Jew, gaining a little courage, and grinning all over his face,

'should, after the Russian fashion, take from hand to hand. . . .'

'What next? what an idea! A Hebrew . . . and Russian customs! Hey! you there! Take the horse; lead him to the stable. And give him some oats. I'll come myself and look after him. And his name is to be—Malek-Adel!'

Tchertop-hanov turned to go up the steps, but turning sharply back, and running up to the Jew, he pressed his hand warmly. The latter was bending down to kiss his hand, but Tchertop-hanov bounded back again, and murmuring, 'Tell no one!' he vanished through the door.

V

From that very day the chief interest, the chief occupation, the chief pleasure in the life of Tchertop-hanov, was Malek-Adel. He loved him as he had not loved even Masha; he became more attached to him than even to Nedopyuskin. And what a horse it was! All fire—simply explosive as gunpowder—and stately as a boyar! Untiring, enduring, obedient, whatever you might put him to; and costing nothing for his keep; he'd be ready to nibble at the ground under his feet if there was nothing else. When he stepped at a walking pace, it was like being lulled to sleep in a nurse's arms; when he trotted, it was like rocking at sea; when he galloped, he outstripped the

wind! Never out of breath, perfectly sound in his wind. Sinews of steel: for him to stumble was a thing never recorded! To take a ditch or a fence was nothing to him—and what a clever beast! At his master's voice he would run with his head in the air; if you told him to stand still and walked away from him, he would not stir; directly you turned back, a faint neigh to say, 'Here I am.' And afraid of nothing: in the pitch-dark, in a snow-storm he would find his way; and he would not let a stranger come near him for anything; he would have had his teeth in him! And a dog dare never approach him; he would have his fore-leg on his head in a minute! and that was the end of the beast. A horse of proper pride, you might flourish a switch over him as an ornament—but God forbid you touched him! But why say more?—a perfect treasure, not a horse!

If Tchertop-hanov set to describing his Malek-Adel, he could not find words to express himself. And how he petted and pampered him! His coat shone like silver—not old, but new silver—with a dark polish on it; if one passed one's hand over it, it was like velvet! His saddle, his cloth, his bridle—all his trappings, in fact, were so well-fitted, in such good order, so bright—a perfect picture! Tchertop-hanov himself—what more can we say?—with his own hands plaited his favourite's fore-locks and mane, and washed his tail with beer, and even, more than once, rubbed his hoofs with

polish. Sometimes he would mount Malek-Adel and ride out, not to see his neighbours—he avoided them, as of old—but across their lands, past their homesteads . . . for them, poor fools, to admire him from a distance! Or he would hear that there was to be a hunt somewhere, that a rich landowner had arranged a meet in some outlying part of his land: he would be off there at once, and would canter in the distance, on the horizon, astounding all spectators by the swiftness and beauty of his horse, and not letting any one come close to him. Once some hunting landowner even gave chase to him with all his suite; he saw Tchertop-hanov was getting away, and he began shouting after him with all his might, as he galloped at full speed: 'Hey, you! Here! Take what you like for your horse! I wouldn't grudge a thousand! I'd give my wife, my children! Take my last farthing!'

Tchertop-hanov suddenly reined in Malek-Adel. The hunting gentleman flew up to him. 'My dear sir!' he shouted, 'tell me what you want? My dear friend!'

'If you were the Tsar,' said Tchertop-hanov emphatically (and he had never heard of Shakespeare), 'you might give me all your kingdom for my horse; I wouldn't take it!' He uttered these words, chuckled, drew Malek-Adel up on to his haunches, turned him in the air on his hind legs like a top or teetotum, and off! He went like a flash over the stubble. And the hunting man (a

rich prince, they said he was) flung his cap on the ground, threw himself down with his face in his cap, and lay so for half an hour.

And how could Tchertop-hanov fail to prize his horse? Was it not thanks to him, he had again an unmistakable superiority, a last superiority over all his neighbours?

VI

Meanwhile time went by, the day fixed for payment was approaching; while, far from having two hundred and fifty roubles, Tchertop-hanov had not even fifty. What was to be done? how could it be met? 'Well,' he decided at last, 'if the Jew is relentless, if he won't wait any longer, I'll give him my house and my land, and I'll set off on my horse, no matter where! I'll starve before I'll give up Malek-Adel!' He was greatly perturbed and even downcast; but at this juncture Fate, for the first and last time, was pitiful and smiled upon him; some distant kinswoman, whose very name was unknown to Tchertop-hanov, left him in her will a sum immense in his eyes—no less than two thousand roubles! And he received this sum in the very nick, as they say, of time; the day before the Jew was to come. Tchertop-hanov almost went out of his mind with joy, but he never even thought of vodka; from the very day Malek-Adel came into his hands he had not touched a drop.

He ran into the stable and kissed his favourite on both sides of his face above the nostrils, where the horse's skin is always so soft. 'Now we shall not be parted!' he cried, patting Malek-Adel on the neck, under his well-combed mane. When he went back into the house, he counted out and sealed up in a packet two hundred and fifty roubles. Then, as he lay on his back and smoked a pipe, he mused on how he would lay out the rest of the money—what dogs he would procure, real Kostroma hounds, spot and tan, and no mistake! He even had a little talk with Perfishka, to whom he promised a new Cossack coat, with yellow braid on all the seams, and went to bed in a blissful frame of mind.

He had a bad dream: he dreamt he was riding out, hunting, not on Malek-Adel, but on some strange beast of the nature of a unicorn; a white fox, white as snow, ran to meet him. . . . He tried to crack his whip, tried to set the dogs on her—but instead of his riding-whip, he found he had a wisp of bast in his hand, and the fox ran in front of him, putting her tongue out at him. He jumped off, his unicorn stumbled, he fell . . . and fell straight into the arms of a police-constable, who was taking him before the Governor-General, and whom he recognised as Yaff. . . .

Tchertop-hanov waked up. The room was dark; the cocks were just crowing for the second time. . . . Somewhere in the far, far distance a horse neighed. Tchertop-hanov lifted up his

head. . . . Once more a faint, faint neigh was heard.

'That's Malek-Adel neighing!' was his thought. . . . 'It's his neigh. But why so far away? Bless us and save us! . . . It can't be . . .'

Tchertop-hanov suddenly turned chill all over; he instantly leaped out of bed, fumbled after his boots and his clothes, dressed himself, and, snatching up the stable-door key from under his pillow, he dashed out into the courtyard.

VII

The stable was at the very end of the courtyard; one wall faced the open country. Tchertop-hanov could not at once fit the key into the lock—his hands were shaking—and he did not immediately turn the key. . . . He stood motionless, holding his breath; if only something would stir inside! 'Malek! Malek!' he cried, in a low voice: the silence of death! Tchertop-hanov unconsciously jogged the key; the door creaked and opened. . . . So, it was not locked. He stepped over the threshold, and again called his horse; this time by his full name, Malek-Adel! But no response came from his faithful companion; only a mouse rustled in the straw. Then Tchertop-hanov rushed into one of the three horse-boxes in the stable in which Malek-Adel was put. He went straight to the horse-box, though it was pitch-dark

around. . . . Empty! Tchertop-hanov's head went round; it seemed as though a bell was booming in his brain. He tried to say something, but only brought out a sort of hiss; and fumbling with his hands above, below, on all sides, breathless, with shaking knees, he made his way from one horse-box to another . . . to a third, full almost to the top with hay; stumbled against one wall, and then the other; fell down, rolled over on his head, got up, and suddenly ran headlong through the half-open door into the courtyard. . . .

'Stolen! Perfishka! Perfishka! Stolen!' he yelled at the top of his voice.

The groom Perfishka flew head-over-heels out of the loft where he slept, with only his shirt on. . . .

Like drunk men they ran against one another, the master and his solitary servant, in the middle of the courtyard; like madmen they turned round each other. The master could not explain what was the matter; nor could the servant make out what was wanted of him. 'Woe! woe!' wailed Tchertop-hanov. 'Woe! woe!' the groom repeated after him. 'A lantern! here! light a lantern! Light! light!' broke at last from Tchertop-hanov's fainting lips. Perfishka rushed into the house.

But to light the lantern, to get fire, was not easy; lucifer matches were regarded as a rarity in those days in Russia; the last embers had long ago gone out in the kitchen; flint and steel were

not quickly found, and they did not work well. Gnashing his teeth, Tchertop-hanov snatched them out of the hands of the flustered Perfishka, and began striking a light himself; the sparks fell in abundance, in still greater abundance fell curses, and even groans; but the tinder either did not catch or went out again, in spite of the united efforts of four swollen cheeks and lips to blow it into a flame! At last, in five minutes, not sooner, a bit of tallow candle was alight at the bottom of a battered lantern; and Tchertop-hanov, accompanied by Perfishka, dashed into the stable, lifted the lantern above his head, looked round. . . .

All empty!

He bounded out into the courtyard, ran up and down it in all directions—no horse anywhere! The hurdle-fence, enclosing Panteley Eremyitch's yard, had long been dilapidated, and in many places was bent and lying on the ground. . . . Beside the stable, it had been completely levelled for a good yard's width. Perfishka pointed this spot out to Tchertop-hanov.

'Master! look here; this wasn't like this to-day. And see the ends of the uprights sticking out of the ground; that means someone has pulled them out.'

Tchertop-hanov ran up with the lantern, moved it about over the ground. . . .

'Hoofs, hoofs, prints of horse-shoes, fresh prints!' he muttered, speaking hurriedly. 'They took him through here, through here!'

He instantly leaped over the fence, and with a shout, 'Malek-Adel! Malek-Adel!' he ran straight into the open country.

Perfishka remained standing bewildered at the fence. The ring of light from the lantern was soon lost to his eyes, swallowed up in the dense darkness of a starless, moonless night.

Fainter and fainter came the sound of the despairing cries of Tchertop-hanov. . . .

VIII

It was daylight when he came home again. He hardly looked like a human being. His clothes were covered with mud, his face had a wild and ferocious expression, his eyes looked dull and sullen. In a hoarse whisper he drove Perfishka away, and locked himself in his room. He could hardly stand with fatigue, but he did not lie on his bed, but sat down on a chair by the door and clutched at his head.

'Stolen! . . . stolen! . . .'

But in what way had the thief contrived by night, when the stable was locked, to steal Malek-Adel? Malek-Adel, who would never let a stranger come near him even by day—steal him, too, without noise, without a sound? And how explain that not a yard-dog had barked? It was true there were only two left—two young puppies—and those two probably burrowing in rubbish from cold and hunger—but still!

'And what am I to do now without Malek-Adel?' Tchertop-hanov brooded. 'I've lost my last pleasure now; it's time to die. Buy another horse, seeing the money has come? But where find another horse like that?'

'Panteley Eremyitch! Panteley Eremyitch!' he heard a timid call at the door.

Tchertop-hanov jumped on to his feet.

'Who is it?' he shouted in a voice not his own.

'It's I, your groom, Perfishka.'

'What do you want? Is he found? has he run home?'

'No, Panteley Eremyitch; but that Jew chap who sold him.' . . .

'Well?'

'He's come.'

'Ho-ho-ho-ho-ho!' yelled Tchertop-hanov, and he at once flung open the door. 'Drag him here! drag him along!'

On seeing the sudden apparition of his 'benefactor's' dishevelled, wild-looking figure, the Jew, who was standing behind Perfishka's back, tried to give them the slip; but Tchertop-hanov, in two bounds, was upon him, and like a tiger flew at his throat.

'Ah! he's come for the money! for the money!' he cried as hoarsely as though he were being strangled himself instead of strangling the Jew; 'you stole him by night, and are come by day for the money, eh? Eh? Eh?'

'Mercy on us, your ex-shelency,' the Jew tried to groan out.

'Tell me, where's my horse? What have you done with him? Whom have you sold him to? Tell me, tell me, tell me!'

The Jew by now could not even groan; his face was rapidly turning livid, and even the expression of fear had vanished from it. His hands dropped and hung lifeless, his whole body, furiously shaken by Tchertop-hanov, waved backwards and forwards like a reed.

'I'll pay you your money, I'll pay it you in full to the last farthing,' roared Tchertop-hanov, 'but I'll strangle you like any chicken if you don't tell me at once!' . . .

'But you have strangled him already, master,' observed the groom Perfishka humbly.

Then only Tchertop-hanov came to his senses.

He let go of the Jew's neck; the latter fell heavily to the ground. Tchertop-hanov picked him up, sat him on a bench, poured a glass of vodka down his throat, and restored him to consciousness. And having restored him to consciousness, he began to talk to him.

It turned out that the Jew had not the slightest idea that Malek-Adel had been stolen. And, indeed, what motive could he have to steal the horse which he had himself procured for his 'revered Panteley Eremyitch.'

Then Tchertop-hanov led him into the stable.

Together they scrutinised the horse-boxes, the

manger, and the lock on the door, turned over the hay and the straw, and then went into the court-yard. Tchertop-hanov showed the Jew the hoof-prints at the fence, and all at once he slapped his thighs.

'Stay!' he cried. 'Where did you buy the horse?'

'In the district of Maloarchangel, at Verhosensky Fair,' answered the Jew.

'Of whom?'

'A Cossack.'

Stay! This Cossack; was he a young man or old?'

'Middle-aged—a steady man.'

'And what was he like? What did he look like? A cunning rascal, I expect?'

'Sure to have been a rascal, your ex-shelency.'

'And, I say, what did he say, this rascal?—had he had the horse long?'

'I recollect he said he 'd had it a long while.'

'Well, then, no one could have stolen him but he! Consider it yourself, listen, stand here! . . . What 's your name?'

The Jew started and turned his little black eyes upon Tchertop-hanov.

'What 's my name?'

'Yes, yes; what are you called?'

'Moshel Leyba.'

'Well, judge then, Moshel Leyba, my friend—you 're a man of sense—whom would Malek-Adel have allowed to touch him except his old master?

You see he must have saddled him and bridled him and taken off his cloth—there it is lying on the hay! . . . and made all his arrangements simply as if he were at home! Why, anyone except his master, Malek-Adel would have trampled under foot! He'd have raised such a din, he'd have roused the whole village? Do you agree with me?'

'I agree, I agree, your ex-shelency.' . . .

'Well, then, it follows that first of all we must find this Cossack!'

'But how are we to find him, your ex-shelency? I have only seen him one little time in my life, and where is he now, and what's his name? Alack, alack!' added the Jew, shaking the long curls over his ears sorrowfully.

'Leyba!' shouted Tchertop-hanov suddenly; 'Leyba, look at me! You see I've lost my senses; I'm not myself! . . . I shall lay hands on myself if you don't come to my aid!'

'But how can I?' . . .

'Come with me, and let us find the thief.'

'But where shall we go?'

'We'll go to the fairs, the highways and by-ways, to the horse-stealers, to towns and villages and hamlets — everywhere, everywhere! And don't trouble about money; I've come into a fortune, brother! I'll spend my last farthing, but I'll get my darling back! And he shan't escape us, our enemy, the Cossack! Where he goes we'll go! If he's hidden in the earth we'll follow him! If he's

gone to the devil, we'll follow him to Satan himself!'

'Oh, why to Satan?' observed the Jew; 'we can do without him.'

'Leyba!' Tchertop-hanov went on; 'Leyba, though you're a Jew, and your creed's an accursed one, you've a soul better than many a Christian soul! Have pity on me! I can't go alone; alone I can never carry the thing through. I'm a hot-headed fellow, but you've a brain—a brain worth its weight in gold! Your race are like that; you succeed in everything without being taught! You're wondering, perhaps, where I could have got the money? Come into my room—I'll show you all the money. You may take it, you may take the cross off my neck, only give me back Malek-Adel; give him me back again!'

Tchertop-hanov was shivering as if he were in a fever; the sweat rolled down his face in drops, and, mingling with his tears, was lost in his moustaches. He pressed Leyba's hands, he besought him, he almost kissed him. . . . He was in a sort of delirium. The Jew tried to object, to declare that it was utterly impossible for him to get away; that he had business. . . It was useless! Tchertop-hanov would not even hear anything. There was no help for it; the poor Jew consented.

The next day Tchertop-hanov set out from Bezsonovo in a peasant cart, with Leyba. The Jew wore a somewhat troubled aspect; he held on to the rail with one hand, while all his withered

figure bounded up and down on the jolting seat; the other hand he held pressed to his bosom, where lay a packet of notes wrapped up in newspaper. Tchertop-hanov sat like a statue, only moving his eyes about him, and drawing in deep breaths; in his sash there was stuck a dagger.

'There, the miscreant who has parted us must look out for himself now!' he muttered, as they drove out on the high-road.

His house he left in the charge of Perfishka and an old cook, a deaf old peasant woman, whom he took care of out of compassion.

'I shall come back to you on Malek-Adel,' he shouted to them at parting, 'or never come back at all!'

'You might as well be married to me at once!' jested Perfishka, giving the cook a dig in the ribs with his elbow. 'No fear! the master'll never come back to us; and here I shall be bored to death all alone!'

IX

A year passed . . . a whole year: no news had come of Panteley Eremyitch. The cook was dead, Perfishka himself made up his mind to abandon the house and go off to town, where he was constantly being persuaded to come by his cousin, apprenticed to a barber; when suddenly a rumour was set afloat that his master was coming back. The

parish deacon got a letter from Panteley Eremyitch himself, in which he informed him of his intention of arriving at Bezsonovo, and asked him to prepare his servant to be ready for his immediate return. These words Perfishka understood to mean that he was to sweep up the place a bit. He did not, however, put much confidence in the news; he was convinced, though, that the deacon had spoken the truth, when a few days later Panteley Eremyitch in person appeared in the courtyard, riding on Malek-Adel.

Perfishka rushed up to his master, and, holding the stirrup, would have helped him to dismount, but the latter got off alone, and with a triumphant glance about him, cried in a loud voice: 'I said I would find Malek-Adel, and I have found him in spite of my enemies, and of Fate itself!' Perfishka went up to kiss his hand, but Tchertop-hanov paid no attention to his servant's devotion. Leading Malek-Adel after him by the rein, he went with long strides towards the stable. Perfishka looked more intently at his master, and his heart sank. 'Oh, how thin and old he's grown in a year; and what a stern, grim face!' One would have thought Panteley Eremyitch would have been rejoicing, that he had gained his end; and he was rejoicing, certainly . . . and yet Perfishka's heart sank: he even felt a sort of dread. Tchertop-hanov put the horse in its old place, gave him a light pat on the back, and said, 'There! now you're at home again; and mind what you're

about.' The same day he hired a freedman out of work as watchman, established himself again in his rooms, and began living as before. . . .

Not altogether as before, however . . . but of that later . . .

The day after his return, Panteley Eremyitch called Perfishka in to him, and for want of anyone else to talk to, began telling him—keeping up, of course, his sense of his own dignity and his bass voice—how he had succeeded in finding Malek-Adel. Tchertop-hanov sat facing the window while he told his story, and smoked a pipe with a long tube while Perfishka stood in the doorway, his hands behind his back, and, respectfully contemplating the back of his master's head, heard him relate how, after many fruitless efforts and idle expeditions, Panteley Eremyitch had at last come to the fair at Romyon by himself, without the Jew Leyba, who, through weakness of character, had not persevered, but had deserted him; how, on the fifth day, when he was on the point of leaving, he walked for the last time along the rows of carts, and all at once he saw between three other horses fastened to the railings—he saw Malek-Adel! How he knew him at once, and how Malek-Adel knew him too, and began neighing, and dragging at his tether, and scraping the earth with his hoof.

'And he was not with the Cossack,' Tchertop-hanov went on, still not turning his head, and in the same bass voice, 'but with a gypsy horse-dealer; I, of course, at once took hold of my horse

and tried to get him away by force, but the brute of a gypsy started yelling as if he'd been scalded, all over the market, and began swearing he'd bought the horse off another gypsy—and wanted to bring witnesses to prove it. . . . I spat, and paid him the money: damn the fellow! All I cared for was that I had found my favourite, and had got back my peace of mind. Moreover, in the Karatchevsky district, I took a man for the Cossack—I took the Jew Leyba's word for it that he was my thief—and smashed his face for him; but the Cossack turned out to be a priest's son, and got damages out of me—a hundred and twenty roubles. Well, money's a thing one may get again, but the great thing is, I've Malek-Adel back again! I'm happy now—I'm going to enjoy myself in peace. And I've one instruction to give you, Perfishka: if ever you, which God forbid, catch sight of the Cossack in this neighbourhood, run the very minute without saying a word, and bring me my gun, and I shall know what to do!'

This was what Panteley Eremyitch said to Perfishka: this was how his tongue spoke; but at heart he was not so completely at peace as he declared.

Alas! in his heart of hearts he was not perfectly convinced that the horse he had brought back was really Malek-Adel!

X

Troubled times followed for Panteley Eremyitch. Peace was just the last thing he enjoyed. He had some happy days, it is true; the doubt stirring within him would seem to him all nonsense; he would drive away the ridiculous idea, like a persistent fly, and even laugh at himself; but he had bad days too: the importunate thought began again stealthily gnawing and tearing at his heart, like a mouse under the floor, and he existed in secret torture. On the memorable day when he found Malek-Adel, Tchertop-hanov had felt nothing but rapturous bliss . . . but the next morning, when, in a low-pitched shed of the inn, he began saddling his recovered joy, beside whom he had spent the whole night, he felt for the first time a certain secret pang. . . . He only shook his head, but the seed was sown. During the homeward journey (it lasted a whole week) doubts seldom arose in him; they grew stronger and more distinct directly he was back at Bezsonovo, directly he was home again in the place where the old authentic Malek-Adel had lived. . . . On the road home he had ridden at a quiet, swinging pace, looking in all directions, smoking a short pipe, and not reflecting at all, except at times the thought struck him: 'When the Tchertop-hanovs want a thing, they get it, you bet!' and he smiled to himself; but on his return home it was a very different state of things. All this, however, he kept to

himself; vanity alone would have prevented him from giving utterance to his inner dread. He would have torn anyone to pieces who had dropped the most distant hint that the new Malek-Adel was possibly not the old one; he accepted congratulations on his 'successful recovery of his horse,' from the few persons whom he happened to meet; but he did not seek such congratulations; he avoided all contact with people more than ever —a bad sign! He was almost always putting Malek-Adel through examinations, if one may use the expression; he would ride him out to some point at a little distance in the open country, and put him to the proof, or would go stealthily into the stable, lock the door after him, and standing right before the horse's head, look into his eyes, and ask him in a whisper, 'Is it you? Is it you? You?' . . . or else stare at him silently and intently for hours together, and then mutter, brightening up: 'Yes! it's he! Of course it's he!' or else go out with a puzzled, even confused look on his face. Tchertop-hanov was not so much confused by the physical differences between *this* Malek-Adel and *that* one . . . though there were a few such differences: *that* one's tail and mane were a little thinner, and his ears more pointed, and his pasterns shorter, and his eyes brighter—but all that might be only fancy; what confounded Tchertop-hanov most were, so to say, the moral differences. The habits of *that* one had been different: all his ways were not the same.

For instance, *that* Malek-Adel had looked round and given a faint neigh every time Tchertop-hanov went into the stable; while *this* one went on munching hay as though nothing had happened, or dozed with his head bent. Both of them stood still when their master leaped out of the saddle; but *that* one came at once at his voice when he was called, while *this* one stood stock still. *That* one galloped as fast, but with higher and longer bounds; *this* one went with a freer step and at a more jolting trot, and at times 'wriggled' with his shoes—that is, knocked the back one against the front one; *that* one had never done anything so disgraceful—God forbid! *This* one, it struck Tchertop-hanov, kept twitching his ears in such a stupid way, while with *that* one it was quite the contrary; he used to lay one ear back, and hold it so, as though on the alert for his master! *That* one, directly he saw that it was dirty about him, would at once knock on the partition of his box with his hind-leg, but *this* one did not care if the dung was heaped up to his belly. *That* one if, for instance, he were set facing the wind, would take deep breaths and shake himself, *this* one simply snorted; *that* one was put out by the rain, *this* one cared nothing for it. . . . This was a coarser beast—coarser! And there wasn't the gentleness in it, and hard in the mouth it was—no denying it! That horse was a darling, but this. . . .

This was what Tchertop-hanov sometimes thought, and very bitter were such thoughts to

him. At other times he would set his horse at full gallop over some newly ploughed field, or would make him leap down to the very bottom of a hollow ravine, and leap out again at the very steepest point, and his heart would throb with rapture, a loud whoop would break from his lips, and he would know, would know for certain, that it was the real, authentic Malek-Adel he had under him; for what other horse could do what this one was doing?

However, there were sometimes shortcomings and misfortunes even here. The prolonged search for Malek-Adel had cost Tchertop-hanov a great deal of money; he did not even dream of Kostroma hounds now, and rode about the neighbourhood in solitude as before. So one morning, four miles from Bezsonovo, Tchertop-hanov chanced to come upon the same prince's hunting party before whom he had cut such a triumphant figure a year and a half before. And, as fate would have it, just as on that day a hare must go leaping out from the hedge before the dogs, down the hillside! Tally-ho! Tally-ho! All the hunt fairly flew after it, and Tchertop-hanov flew along too, but not with the rest of the party, but two hundred paces to one side of it, just as he had done the time before. A huge watercourse ran zigzagging across the hillside, and as it rose higher and higher got gradually narrower, cutting off Tchertop-hanov's path. At the point where he had to jump it, and where, eighteen months before, he actually had

jumped it, it was eight feet wide and fourteen feet deep. In anticipation of a triumph—a triumph repeated in such a delightful way—Tchertop-hanov chuckled exultantly, cracked his riding-whip; the hunting party were galloping too, their eyes fixed on the daring rider; his horse whizzed along like a bullet, and now the watercourse was just under his nose—now, now, at one leap, as then! . . . But Malek-Adel pulled up sharply, wheeled to the left, and in spite of Tchertop-hanov's tugging him to the edge, to the watercourse, he galloped along beside the ravine.

He was afraid, then; did not trust himself!

Then Tchertop-hanov, burning with shame and wrath, almost in tears, dropped the reins, and set the horse going straight forward, down the hill, away, away from the hunting party, if only not to hear them jeering at him, to escape as soon as might be from their damnable eyes!

Covered with foam, his sides lashed unmercifully, Malek-Adel galloped home, and Tchertop-hanov at once locked himself into his room.

'No, it's not he; it's not my darling! He would have broken his neck before he would have betrayed me!'

XI

What finally 'did for,' as they say, Tchertop-hanov was the following circumstance. One day he sauntered, riding on Malek-Adel, about the

back-yards of the priest's quarters round about the church of the parish in which is Bezsonovo. Huddled up, with his Cossack fur cap pulled down over his eyes, and his hands hanging loose on the saddle-bow, he jogged slowly on, a vague discontent in his heart. Suddenly someone called him.

He stopped his horse, raised his head, and saw his correspondent, the deacon. With a brown, three-cornered hat on his brown hair, which was plaited in a pig-tail, attired in a yellowish nankin long coat, girt much below the waist by a strip of blue stuff, the servant of the altar had come out into his back-garden, and, catching sight of Panteley Eremyitch, he thought it his duty to pay his respects to him, and to take the opportunity of doing so to ask him a question about something. Without some such hidden motive, as we know, ecclesiastical persons do not venture to address temporal ones.

But Tchertop-hanov was in no mood for the deacon; he barely responded to his bow, and, muttering something between his teeth, he was already cracking his whip, when . . .

'What a magnificent horse you have!' the deacon made haste to add: 'and really you can take credit to yourself for it. Truly you're a man of amazing cleverness, simply a lion indeed!'

His reverence the deacon prided himself on his fluency, which was a great source of vexation to his reverence the priest, to whom the gift of words

had not been vouchsafed; even vodka did not loosen his tongue.

'After losing one animal by the cunning of evil men,' continued the deacon, 'you did not lose courage in repining; but, on the other hand, trusting the more confidently in Divine Providence, procured yourself another, in no wise inferior, but even, one may say, superior, since . . .'

'What nonsense are you talking?' Tchertop-hanov interrupted gloomily; 'what other horse do you mean? This is the same one; this is Malek-Adel. . . . I found him. The fellow's raving!' . . .

'Ay! ay! ay!' responded the deacon emphatically with a sort of drawl, drumming with his fingers in his beard, and eyeing Tchertop-hanov with his bright eager eyes: 'How's that, sir? Your horse, God help my memory, was stolen a fortnight before Intercession last year, and now we're near the end of November.'

'Well, what of that?'

The deacon still fingered his beard.

'Why, it follows that more than a year's gone by since then, and your horse was a dapple grey then, just as it is now; in fact, it seems even darker. How's that? Grey horses get a great deal lighter in colour in a year.'

Tchertop-hanov started . . . as though someone had driven a dagger into his heart. It was true: the grey colour did change! How was it such a simple reflection had never occurred to him?

'You damned pigtail! get out!' he yelled sud-

denly, his eyes flashing with fury, and instantaneously he disappeared out of the sight of the amazed deacon.

Well, everything was over!

Now, at last, everything was really over, everything was shattered, the last card trumped. Everything crumbled away at once before that word 'lighter'!

Grey horses get lighter in colour!

'Gallop, gallop on, accursed brute! You can never gallop away from that word!'

Tchertop-hanov flew home, and again locked himself up.

XII

That this worthless jade was not Malek-Adel; that between him and Malek-Adel there was not the smallest resemblance; that any man of the slightest sense would have seen this from the first minute; that he, Tchertop-hanov, had been taken in in the vulgarest way—no! that he purposely, of set intent, tricked himself, blinded his own eyes—of all this he had not now the faintest doubt!

Tchertop-hanov walked up and down in his room, turning monotonously on his heels at each wall, like a beast in a cage. His vanity suffered intolerably; but he was not only tortured by the sting of wounded vanity; he was overwhelmed by despair, stifled by rage, and burning with the thirst for revenge. But rage against whom? On

whom was he to be revenged? On the Jew, Yaff, Masha, the deacon, the Cossack-thief, all his neighbours, the whole world, himself? His brain was giving way. The last card was trumped! (That simile gratified him.) And he was again the most worthless, the most contemptible of men, a common laughing-stock, a motley fool, a damned idiot, an object for jibes—to a deacon! . . . He fancied, he pictured vividly how that loathsome pig-tailed priest would tell the story of the grey horse and the foolish gentleman. . . . O damn!! In vain Tchertop-hanov tried to check his rising passion, in vain he tried to assure himself that this . . . horse, though not Malek-Adel, was still . . . a good horse, and might be of service to him for many years to come; he put this thought away from him on the spot with fury, as though there were contained in it a new insult to *that* Malek-Adel whom he considered he had wronged so already. . . . Yes, indeed! this jade, this carrion he, like a blind idiot, had put on a level with him, Malek-Adel! And as to the service the jade could be to him! . . . as though he would ever deign to get astride of him? Never! on no consideration!! . . . He would sell him to a Tartar for dog's meat—it deserved no better end. . . . Yes, that would be best!'

For more than two hours Tchertop-hanov wandered up and down his room.

'Perfishka!' he called peremptorily all of a sudden, 'run this minute to the tavern; fetch a

gallon of vodka! Do you hear? A gallon, and look sharp! I want the vodka here this very second on the table!'

The vodka was not long in making its appearance on Panteley Eremyitch's table, and he began drinking.

XIII

If anyone had looked at Tchertop-hanov then; if anyone could have been a witness of the sullen exasperation with which he drained glass after glass—he would inevitably have felt an involuntary shudder of fear. The night came on, the tallow candle burnt dimly on the table. Tchertop-hanov ceased wandering from corner to corner; he sat all flushed, with dull eyes, which he dropped at one time on the floor, at another fixed obstinately on the dark window; he got up, poured out some vodka, drank it off, sat down again, again fixed his eyes on one point, and did not stir—only his breathing grew quicker and his face still more flushed. It seemed as though some resolution were ripening within him, which he was himself ashamed of, but which he was gradually getting used to; one single thought kept obstinately and undeviatingly moving up closer and closer, one single image stood out more and more distinctly, and under the burning weight of heavy drunkenness the angry irritation was replaced by a feeling

of ferocity in his heart, and a vindictive smile appeared on his lips.

'Yes, the time has come!' he declared in a matter-of-fact, almost weary tone. 'I must get to work.'

He drank off the last glass of vodka, took from over his bed the pistol—the very pistol from which he had shot at Masha—loaded it, put some cartridges in his pocket—to be ready for anything—and went round to the stables.

The watchman ran up to him when he began to open the door, but he shouted to him: 'It's I! Are you blind? Get out!' The watchman moved a little aside. 'Get out and go to bed!' Tchertop-hanov shouted at him again: 'there's nothing for you to guard here! A mighty wonder, a treasure indeed to watch over!' He went into the stable. Malek-Adel . . . the spurious Malek-Adel, was lying on his litter. Tchertop-hanov gave him a kick, saying, 'Get up, you brute!' Then he unhooked a halter from a nail, took off the horse-cloth and flung it on the ground, and roughly turning the submissive horse round in the box, led it out into the courtyard, and from the yard into the open country, to the great amazement of the watchman, who could not make out at all where the master was going off to by night, leading an unharnessed horse. He was, of course, afraid to question him, and only followed him with his eyes till he disappeared at the bend in the road leading to a neighbouring wood.

XIV

Tchertop-hanov walked with long strides, not stopping nor looking round. Malek-Adel—we will call him by that name to the end—followed him meekly. It was a rather clear night; Tchertop-hanov could make out the jagged outline of the forest, which formed a black mass in front of him. When he got into the chill night air, he would certainly have thrown off the intoxication of the vodka he had drunk, if it had not been for another, stronger intoxication, which completely overmastered him. His head was heavy, his blood pulsed in thuds in his throat and ears, but he went on steadily, and knew where he was going.

He had made up his mind to kill Malek-Adel; he had thought of nothing else the whole day. . . . Now he had made up his mind!

He went out to do this thing not only calmly, but confidently, unhesitatingly, as a man going about something from a sense of duty. This 'job' seemed a very 'simple' thing to him; in making an end of the impostor, he was quits with 'everyone' at once—he punished himself for his stupidity, and made expiation to his real darling, and showed the whole world (Tchertop-hanov worried himself a great deal about the 'whole world') that he was not to be trifled with . . . And, above all, he was making an end of himself too with the impostor—for what had he to live for now? How all this took shape in his brain, and why, it seemed to him

so simple—it is not easy to explain, though not altogether impossible; stung to the quick, solitary, without a human soul near to him, without a half-penny, and with his blood on fire with vodka, he was in a state bordering on madness, and there is no doubt that even in the absurdest freaks of mad people there is, to their eyes, a sort of logic, and even justice. Of his justice Tchertop-hanov was, at any rate, fully persuaded; he did not hesitate, he made haste to carry out sentence on the guilty without giving himself any clear definition of whom he meant by that term. . . . To tell the truth, he reflected very little on what he was about to do. 'I must, I must make an end,' was what he kept stupidly and severely repeating to himself; 'I must make an end!'

And the guiltless guilty one followed in a submissive trot behind his back. . . . But there was no pity for him in Tchertop-hanov's heart.

XV

Not far from the forest to which he was leading his horse there stretched a small ravine, half overgrown with young oak bushes. Tchertop-hanov went down into it. . . . Malek-Adel stumbled and almost fell on him.

'So you would crush me, would you, you damned brute!' shouted Tchertop-hanov, and, as though in self-defence, he pulled the pistol out of his

pocket. He no longer felt furious exasperation, but that special numbness of the senses which they say comes over a man before the perpetration of a crime. But his own voice terrified him—it sounded so wild and strange under the cover of dark branches in the close, decaying dampness of the forest ravine! Moreover, in response to his exclamation, some great bird suddenly fluttered in a tree-top above his head . . . Tchertop-hanov shuddered. He had, as it were, roused a witness to his act—and where? In that silent place where he should not have met a living creature. . . .

'Away with you, devil, to the four winds of heaven!' he muttered, and letting go Malek-Adel's rein, he gave him a violent blow on the shoulder with the butt end of the pistol. Malek-Adel promptly turned back, clambered out of the ravine . . . and ran away. But the thud of his hoofs was not long audible. The rising wind confused and blended all sounds together.

Tchertop-hanov too slowly clambered out of the ravine, reached the forest, and made his way along the road homewards. He was ill at ease with himself; the weight he had felt in his head and his heart had spread over all his limbs; he walked angry, gloomy, dissatisfied, hungry, as though some one had insulted him, snatched his prey, his food from him. . . .

The suicide, baffled in his intent, must know such sensations.

Suddenly something poked him behind between

his shoulder blades. He looked round. . . .Malek-Adel was standing in the middle of the road. He had walked after his master; he touched him with his nose to announce himself.

'Ah!' shouted Tchertop-hanov, 'of yourself, of yourself you have come to your death! So, there!'

In the twinkling of an eye he had snatched out his pistol, drawn the trigger, turned the muzzle on Malek-Adel's brow, fired. . . .

The poor horse sprung aside, rose on its haunches, bounded ten paces away, and suddenly fell heavily, and gasped as it writhed upon the ground. . . .

Tchertop-hanov put his two hands over his ears and ran away His knees were shaking under him. His drunkenness and revenge and blind self-confidence—all had flown at once. There was left nothing but a sense of shame and loathing—and the consciousness, unmistakeable, that this time he had put an end to himself too

XVI

Six weeks later, the groom Perfishka thought it his duty to stop the commissioner of police as he happened to be passing Bezsonovo.

'What do you want?' inquired the guardian of order.

'If you please, your excellency, come into our house,' answered the groom with a low bow.

'Panteley Eremyitch, I fancy, is about to die; so that I 'm afraid of getting into trouble.'

'What? die?' queried the commissioner.

'Yes, sir. First, his honour drank vodka every day, and now he 's taken to his bed and got very thin. I fancy his honour does not understand anything now. He 's lost his tongue completely.'

The commissioner got out of his trap.

'Have you sent for the priest, at least? Has your master been confessed? Taken the sacrament?'

'No, sir!'

The commissioner frowned. 'How is that, my boy? How can that be—hey? Don't you know that for that . . . you 're liable to have to answer heavily—hey?'

'Indeed, and I did ask him the day before yesterday, and yesterday again,' protested the intimidated groom. "Wouldn't you, Panteley Eremyitch," says I, "let me run for the priest, sir?" "You hold your tongue, idiot," says he; "mind your own business." But to-day, when I began to address him, his honour only looked at me, and twitched his moustache.'

'And has he been drinking a great deal of vodka?' inquired the commissioner.

'Rather! But if you would be so good, your honour, come into his room.'

'Well, lead the way!' grumbled the commissioner, and he followed Perfishka.

An astounding sight was in store for him. In a damp, dark back-room, on a wretched bedstead

covered with a horsecloth, with a rough felt cloak for a pillow, lay Tchertop-hanov. He was not pale now, but yellowish-green, like a corpse, with sunken eyes under leaden lids and a sharp, pinched nose—still reddish—above his dishevelled whiskers. He lay dressed in his invariable Caucasian coat, with the cartridge pockets on the breast, and blue Circassian trousers. A Cossack cap with a crimson crown covered his forehead to his very eyebrows. In one hand Tchertop-hanov held his hunting whip, in the other an embroidered tobacco pouch—Masha's last gift to him. On a table near the bed stood an empty spirit bottle, and at the head of the bed were two water-colour sketches pinned to the wall; one represented, as far as could be made out, a fat man with a guitar in his hand—probably Nedopyuskin; the other portrayed a horseman galloping at full speed. . . . The horse was like those fabulous animals which are sketched by children on walls and fences; but the carefully washed-in dappling of the horse's grey coat, and the cartridge pocket on the rider's breast, the pointed toes of his boots, and the immense moustaches, left no room for doubt—this sketch was meant to represent Panteley Eremyitch riding on Malek-Adel.

The astonished commissioner of police did not know how to proceed. The silence of death reigned in the room. 'Why, he's dead already!' he thought, and raising his voice, he said, 'Panteley Eremyitch! Eh, Panteley Eremyitch!'

Then something extraordinary occurred. Tchertop-hanov's eyelids slowly opened, the eyes, fast growing dim, moved first from right to left, then from left to right, rested on the commissioner—saw him. . . . Something gleamed in their dull whites, the semblance of a flash came back to them, the blue lips were gradually unglued, and a hoarse, almost sepulchral, voice was heard.

'Panteley Eremyitch of the ancient hereditary nobility is dying: who can hinder him? He owes no man anything, asks nothing from any one. . . . Leave him, people! Go!'

The hand holding the whip tried to lift it . . . In vain! The lips cleaved together again, the eyes closed, and as before Tchertop-hanov lay on his comfortless bed, flat as an empty sack, and his feet close together.

'Let me know when he dies,' the commissioner whispered to Perfishka as he went out of the room; 'and I suppose you can send for the priest now. You must observe due order; give him extreme unction.'

Perfishka went that same day for the priest, and the following morning he had to let the commissioner know: Panteley Eremyitch had died in the night.

When they buried him, two men followed his coffin; the groom Perfishka and Moshel Leyba. The news of Tchertop-hanov's death had somehow reached the Jew, and he did not fail to pay this last act of respect to his benefactor.

XXIII

A LIVING RELIC

'O native land of long suffering,
Land of the Russian people.'

F. TYUTCHEV.

A FRENCH proverb says that 'a dry fisherman and a wet hunter are a sorry sight.' Never having had any taste for fishing, I cannot decide what are the fisherman's feelings in fine bright weather, and how far in bad weather the pleasure derived from the abundance of fish compensates for the unpleasantness of being wet. But for the sportsman rain is a real calamity. It was to just this calamity that Yermolaï and I were exposed on one of our expeditions after grouse in the Byelevsky district. The rain never ceased from early morning. What didn't we do to escape it? We put macintosh capes almost right over our heads, and stood under the trees to avoid the raindrops. . . . The waterproof capes, to say nothing of their hindering our shooting, let the water through in the most shameless fashion; and under the trees, though at first, certainly, the rain did not reach us,

afterwards the water collected on the leaves suddenly rushed through, every branch dripped on us like a waterspout, a chill stream made its way under our neck-ties, and trickled down our spines. . . . This was 'quite unpleasant,' as Yermolaï expressed it. 'No, Piotr Petrovitch,' he cried at last; 'we can't go on like this. . . . There 's no shooting to-day. The dogs' scent is drowned. The guns miss fire. . . . Pugh! What a mess!'

'What 's to be done?' I queried.

'Well, let 's go to Aleksyevka. You don't know it, perhaps—there 's a settlement of that name belonging to your mother; it 's seven miles from here. We 'll stay the night there, and to-morrow. . . .'

'Come back here?'

'No, not here. . . . I know of some places beyond Aleksyevka . . . ever so much better than here for grouse!'

I did not proceed to question my faithful companion why he had not taken me to those parts before, and the same day we made our way to my mother's peasant settlement, the existence of which, I must confess, I had not even suspected up till then. At this settlement, it turned out, there was a little lodge. It was very old, but, as it had not been inhabited, it was clean; I passed a fairly tranquil night in it.

The next day I woke up very early. The sun had only just risen; there was not a single cloud in the sky; everything around shone with a

double brilliance — the brightness of the fresh morning rays and of yesterday's downpour. While they were harnessing me a cart, I went for a stroll about a small orchard, now neglected and run wild, which enclosed the little lodge on all sides with its fragrant, sappy growth. Ah, how sweet it was in the open air, under the bright sky, where the larks were trilling, whence their bell-like notes rained down like silvery beads! On their wings, doubtless, they had carried off drops of dew, and their songs seemed steeped in dew. I took my cap off my head and drew a glad deep breath. . . . On the slope of a shallow ravine, close to the hedge, could be seen a beehive; a narrow path led to it, winding like a snake between dense walls of high grass and nettles, above which struggled up, God knows whence brought, the pointed stalks of dark-green hemp.

I turned along this path; I reached the beehive. Beside it stood a little wattled shanty, where they put the beehives for the winter. I peeped into the half-open door; it was dark, still, dry within; there was a scent of mint and balm. In the corner were some trestles fitted together, and on them, covered with a quilt, a little figure of some sort. . . . I was walking away. . . .

'Master, master! Piotr Petrovitch!' I heard a voice, faint, slow, and hoarse, like the whispering of marsh rushes.

I stopped.

'Piotr Petrovitch! Come in, please!' the voice

repeated. It came from the corner where were the trestles I had noticed.

I drew near, and was struck dumb with amazement. Before me lay a living human being; but what sort of a creature was it?

A head utterly withered, of a uniform coppery hue—like some very ancient holy picture, yellow with age; a sharp nose like a keen-edged knife; the lips could barely be seen—only the teeth flashed white and the eyes; and from under the kerchief some thin wisps of yellow hair straggled on to the forehead. At the chin, where the quilt was folded, two tiny hands of the same coppery hue were moving, the fingers slowly twitching like little sticks. I looked more intently; the face, far from being ugly, was positively beautiful, but strange and dreadful; and the face seemed the more dreadful to me that on it—on its metallic cheeks—I saw, struggling . . . struggling, and unable to form itself—a smile.

'You don't recognise me, master?' whispered the voice again: it seemed to be breathed from the almost unmoving lips. 'And, indeed, how should you? I'm Lukerya. . . . Do you remember, who used to lead the dance at your mother's, at Spasskoye? . . . Do you remember, I used to be leader of the choir too?'

'Lukerya!' I cried. 'Is it you? Can it be?'

'Yes, it's I, master—I, Lukerya.'

I did not know what to say, and gazed in stupefaction at the dark motionless face with the

clear, death-like eyes fastened upon me. Was it possible? This mummy Lukerya—the greatest beauty in all our household—that tall, plump, pink-and-white, singing, laughing, dancing creature! Lukerya, our smart Lukerya, whom all our lads were courting, for whom I heaved some secret sighs—I, a boy of sixteen!

'Mercy, Lukerya!' I said at last; 'what is it has happened to you?'

'Oh, such a misfortune befel me! But don't mind me, sir; don't let my trouble revolt you; sit there on that little tub—a little nearer, or you won't be able to hear me. . . . I've not much of a voice now-a-days! . . . Well, I am glad to see you! What brought you to Alexsyevka?'

Lukerya spoke very softly and feebly, but without pausing.

'Yermolaï, the huntsman, brought me here. But you tell me . . .'

'Tell you about my trouble? Certainly, sir. It happened to me a long while ago now—six or seven years. I had only just been betrothed then to Vassily Polyakov—do you remember, such a fine-looking fellow he was, with curly hair?—he waited at table at your mother's. But you weren't in the country then; you had gone away to Moscow to your studies. We were very much in love, Vassily and me; I could never get him out of my head; and it was in the spring it all happened. Well, one night . . . not long before sunrise, it was . . . I couldn't sleep; a nightingale

in the garden was singing so wonderfully sweet! . . . I could not help getting up and going out on to the steps to listen. It trilled and trilled . . . and all at once I fancied some one called me; it seemed like Vassya's voice, so softly, "Lusha!" . . . I looked round, and being half asleep, I suppose, I missed my footing and fell straight down from the top-step, and flop on to the ground! And I thought I wasn't much hurt, for I got up directly and went back to my room. Only it seems something inside me—in my body—was broken. . . . Let me get my breath . . . half a minute . . . sir.'

Lukerya ceased, and I looked at her with surprise. What surprised me particularly was that she told her story almost cheerfully, without sighs and groans, not complaining nor asking for sympathy.

'Ever since that happened,' Lukerya went on, 'I began to pine away and get thin; my skin got dark; walking was difficult for me; and then—I lost the use of my legs altogether; I couldn't stand or sit; I had to lie down all the time. And I didn't care to eat or drink; I got worse and worse. Your mamma, in the kindness of her heart, made me see doctors, and sent me to a hospital. But there was no curing me. And not one doctor could even say what my illness was. What didn't they do to me?—they burnt my spine with hot irons, they put me in lumps of ice, and it was all no good. I got quite numb in the end. . . .

So the gentlemen decided it was no use doctoring me any more, and there was no sense in keeping cripples up at the great house . . . well, and so they sent me here—because I've relations here. So here I live, as you see.'

Lukerya was silent again, and again she tried to smile.

'But this is awful—your position!' I cried . . . and not knowing how to go on, I asked: 'and what of Vassily Polyakov?' A most stupid question it was.

Lukerya turned her eyes a little away.

'What of Polyakov? He grieved—he grieved for a bit—and he is married to another, a girl from Glinnoe. Do you know Glinnoe? It's not far from us. Her name's Agrafena. He loved me dearly—but, you see, he's a young man; he couldn't stay a bachelor. And what sort of a helpmeet could I be? The wife he found for himself is a good, sweet woman—and they have children. He lives here; he's a clerk at a neighbour's; your mamma let him go off with a passport, and he's doing very well, praise God.'

'And so you go on lying here all the time?' I asked again.

'Yes, sir, I've been lying here seven years. In the summer-time I lie here in this shanty, and when it gets cold they move me out into the bath-house: I lie there.'

'Who waits on you? Does any one look after you?'

'Oh, there are kind folks here as everywhere; they don't desert me. Yes, they see to me a little. As to food, I eat nothing to speak of; but water is here, in the pitcher; it's always kept full of pure spring water. I can reach to the pitcher myself: I've one arm still of use. There's a little girl here, an orphan; now and then she comes to see me, the kind child. She was here just now. . . . You didn't meet her? Such a pretty, fair little thing. She brings me flowers. We've some in the garden—there were some—but they've all disappeared. But, you know, wild flowers too are nice; they smell even sweeter than garden flowers. Lilies of the valley, now . . . what could be sweeter?'

'And aren't you dull and miserable, my poor Lukerya?'

'Why, what is one to do? I wouldn't tell a lie about it. At first it was very wearisome; but later on I got used to it, I got more patient—it was nothing; there are others worse off still.'

'How do you mean?'

'Why, some haven't a roof to shelter them, and there are some blind or deaf; while I, thank God, have splendid sight, and hear everything—everything. If a mole burrows in the ground—I hear even that. And I can smell every scent, even the faintest! When the buckwheat comes into flower in the meadow, or the lime-tree in the garden—I don't need to be told of it, even; I'm the first to know directly. Anyway, if there's

the least bit of a wind blowing from that quarter. No, he who stirs God's wrath is far worse off than me. Look at this, again: anyone in health may easily fall into sin; but I 'm cut off even from sin. The other day, father Aleksy, the priest, came to give me the sacrament, and he says: "There 's no need," says he, "to confess you; you can't fall into sin in your condition, can you?" But I said to him; "How about sinning in thought, father?" "Ah, well," says he, and he laughed himself, "that 's no great sin."

'But I fancy I 'm no great sinner even in that way, in thought,' Lukerya went on, 'for I 've trained myself not to think, and above all, not to remember. The time goes faster.'

I must own I was astonished. 'You 're always alone, Lukerya: how can you prevent the thoughts from coming into your head? or are you constantly asleep?'

'Oh, no, sir! I can't always sleep. Though I 've no great pain, still I 've an ache, there, right inside, and in my bones too; it won't let me sleep as I ought. No . . . but there, I lie by myself; I lie here and lie here, and don't think: I feel that I 'm alive, I breathe; and I put myself all into that. I look and listen. The bees buzz and hum in the hive; a dove sits on the roof and coos; a hen comes along with her chickens to peck up crumbs; or a sparrow flies in, or a butterfly—that's a great treat for me. Last year some swallows even built a nest over there in the corner, and brought up

their little ones. Oh, how interesting it was! One would fly to the nest, press close, feed a young one, and off again. Look again: the other would be in her place already. Sometimes it wouldn't fly in, but only fly past the open door; and the little ones would begin to squeak, and open their beaks directly. . . . I was hoping for them back again the next year, but they say a sportsman here shot them with his gun. And what could he gain by it? It's hardly bigger, the swallow, than a beetle. . . . What wicked men you are, you sportsmen!'

'I don't shoot swallows,' I hastened to remark.

'And once,' Lukerya began again, 'it was comical, really. A hare ran in, it did really! The hounds, I suppose, were after it; anyway, it seemed to tumble straight in at the door! . . . It squatted quite near me, and sat so a long while; it kept sniffing with its nose, and twitching its whiskers—like a regular officer! and it looked at me. It understood, to be sure, that I was no danger to it. At last it got up, went hop-hop to the door, looked round in the doorway; and what did it look like? Such a funny fellow it was!'

Lukerya glanced at me, as much as to say, 'Wasn't it funny?' To satisfy her, I laughed. She moistened her parched lips.

'Well, in the winter, of course, I'm worse off, because it's dark: to burn a candle would be a pity, and what would be the use? I can read, to be sure, and was always fond of reading, but what

could I read? There are no books of any kind, and even if there were, how could I hold a book? Father Aleksy brought me a calendar to entertain me, but he saw it was no good, so he took and carried it away again. But even though it's dark, there's always something to listen to: a cricket chirps, or a mouse begins scratching somewhere. That's when it's a good thing—not to think!'

'And I repeat the prayers too,' Lukerya went on, after taking breath a little; 'only I don't know many of them—the prayers, I mean. And besides, why should I weary the Lord God? What can I ask Him for? He knows better than I what I need. He has laid a cross upon me: that means that He loves me. So we are commanded to understand. I repeat the Lord's Prayer, the Hymn to the Virgin, the Supplication of all the Afflicted, and I lie still again, without any thought at all, and am all right!'

Two minutes passed by. I did not break the silence, and did not stir on the narrow tub which served me as a seat. The cruel stony stillness of the living, unlucky creature lying before me communicated itself to me; I too turned, as it were, numb.

'Listen, Lukerya,' I began at last; 'listen to the suggestion I'm going to make to you. Would you like me to arrange for them to take you to a hospital—a good hospital in the town? Who knows, perhaps you might yet be cured; anyway, you would not be alone' . . .

Lukerya's eyebrows fluttered faintly. 'Oh, no, sir,' she answered in a troubled whisper; 'don't move me into a hospital; don't touch me. I shall only have more agony to bear there! How could they cure me now? . . . Why, there was a doctor came here once; he wanted to examine me. I begged him, for Christ's sake, not to disturb me. It was no use. He began turning me over, pounding my hands and legs, and pulling me about. He said, "I'm doing this for Science; I'm a servant of Science—a scientific man! And you," he said, "really oughtn't to oppose me, because I've a medal given me for my labours, and it's for you simpletons I'm toiling." He mauled me about, told me the name of my disease—some wonderful long name—and with that he went away; and all my poor bones ached for a week after. You say "I'm all alone; always alone." Oh, no, I'm not always; they come to see me—I'm quiet—I don't bother them. The peasant girls come in and chat a bit; a pilgrim woman will wander in, and tell me tales of Jerusalem, of Kiev, of the holy towns. And I'm not afraid of being alone. Indeed, it's better—ay, ay! Master, don't touch me, don't take me to the hospital. . . . Thank you, you are kind; only don't touch me, there's a dear!'

'Well, as you like, as you like, Lukerya. You know, I only suggested it for your good.'

'I know, master, that it was for my good. But, master dear, who can help another? Who can

enter into his soul? Every man must help himself! You won't believe me, perhaps. I lie here sometimes so alone . . . and it's as though there were no one else in the world but me. As if I alone were living! And it seems to me as though something were blessing me. . . . I'm carried away by dreams that are really marvellous!'

'What do you dream of, then, Lukerya?'

'That, too, master, I couldn't say; one can't explain. Besides, one forgets afterwards. It's like a cloud coming over and bursting, then it grows so fresh and sweet; but just what it was, there's no knowing! Only my idea is, if folks were near me, I should have nothing of that, and should feel nothing except my misfortune.'

Lukerya heaved a painful sigh. Her breathing, like her limbs, was not under her control.

'When I come to think, master, of you,' she began again, 'you are very sorry for me. But you mustn't be too sorry, really! I'll tell you one thing; for instance, I sometimes, even now. . . . Do you remember how merry I used to be in my time? A regular madcap! . . . So do you know what? I sing songs even now.'

'Sing? . . . You?'

'Yes; I sing the old songs, songs for choruses, for feasts, Christmas songs, all sorts! I know such a lot of them, you see, and I've not forgotten them. Only dance songs I don't sing. In my state now, it wouldn't suit me.'

'How do you sing them? . . . to yourself?'

'To myself, yes; and aloud too. I can't sing loud, but still one can understand it. I told you a little girl waits on me. A clever little orphan she is. So I have taught her; four songs she has learnt from me already. Don't you believe me? Wait a minute, I'll show you directly. . . .'

Lukerya took breath. . . . The thought that this half-dead creature was making ready to begin singing raised an involuntary feeling of dread in me. But before I could utter a word, a long-drawn-out, hardly audible, but pure and true note, was quivering in my ears . . . it was followed by a second and a third. 'In the meadows,' sang Lukerya. She sang, the expression of her stony face unchanged, even her eyes riveted on one spot. But how touchingly tinkled out that poor struggling little voice, that wavered like a thread of smoke: how she longed to pour out all her soul in it! . . . I felt no dread now; my heart throbbed with unutterable pity.

'Ah, I can't!' she said suddenly. 'I've not the strength. I'm so upset with joy at seeing you.'

She closed her eyes.

I laid my hand on her tiny, chill fingers. . . . She glanced at me, and her dark lids, fringed with golden eyelashes, closed again, and were still as an ancient statue's. An instant later they glistened in the half-darkness. . . . They were moistened by a tear.

As before, I did not stir.

'How silly I am!' said Lukerya suddenly, with

unexpected force, and opened her eyes wide: she tried to wink the tears out of them. 'I ought to be ashamed! What am I doing? It's a long time since I have been like this . . . not since that day when Vassya-Polyakov was here last spring. While he sat with me and talked, I was all right; but when he had gone away, how I did cry in my loneliness! Where did I get the tears from? But, there! we girls get our tears for nothing. Master,' added Lukerya, 'perhaps you have a handkerchief. . . . If you won't mind, wipe my eyes.'

I made haste to carry out her desire, and left her the handkerchief. She refused it at first. . . . 'What good's such a gift to me?' she said. The handkerchief was plain enough, but clean and white. Afterwards she clutched it in her weak fingers, and did not loosen them again. As I got used to the darkness in which we both were, I could clearly make out her features, could even perceive the delicate flush that peeped out under the coppery hue of her face, could discover in the face, so at least it seemed to me, traces of its former beauty.

'You asked me, master,' Lukerya began again, 'whether I sleep. I sleep very little, but every time I fall asleep I've dreams—such splendid dreams! I'm never ill in my dreams; I'm always so well, and young. . . . There's one thing's sad: I wake up and long for a good stretch, and I'm all as if I were in chains. I once had such an

exquisite dream! Shall I tell it you? Well, listen. I dreamt I was standing in a meadow, and all round me was rye, so tall, and ripe as gold! . . . and I had a reddish dog with me—such a wicked dog; it kept trying to bite me. And I had a sickle in my hands; not a simple sickle; it seemed to be the moon itself—the moon as it is when it's the shape of a sickle. And with this same moon I had to cut the rye clean. Only I was very weary with the heat, and the moon blinded me, and I felt lazy; and cornflowers were growing all about, and such big ones! And they all turned their heads to me. And I thought in my dream I would pick them; Vassya had promised to come, so I'd pick myself a wreath first; I'd still time to plait it. I began picking cornflowers, but they kept melting away from between my fingers, do what I would. And I couldn't make myself a wreath. And meanwhile I heard someone coming up to me, so close, and calling, "Lusha! Lusha!" . . . "Ah," I thought, "what a pity I hadn't time!" No matter, I put that moon on my head instead of cornflowers. I put it on like a tiara, and I was all brightness directly; I made the whole field light around me. And, behold! over the very top of the ears there came gliding very quickly towards me, not Vassya, but Christ Himself! And how I knew it was Christ I can't say; they don't paint Him like that—only it was He! No beard, tall, young, all in white, only His belt was golden; and He held out

His hand to me. "Fear not," said He; "My bride adorned, follow Me; you shall lead the choral dance in the heavenly kingdom, and sing the songs of Paradise." And how I clung to His hand! My dog at once followed at my heels . . . but then we began to float upwards! He in front. . . . His wings spread wide over all the sky, long like a sea-gull's—and I after Him! And my dog had to stay behind. Then only I understood that that dog was my illness, and that in the heavenly kingdom there was no place for it.'

Lukerya paused a minute.

'And I had another dream, too,' she began again; 'but may be it was a vision. I really don't know. It seemed to me I was lying in this very shanty, and my dead parents, father and mother, come to me and bow low to me, but say nothing. And I asked them, "Why do you bow down to me, father and mother?" "Because," they said, "you suffer much in this world, so that you have not only set free your own soul, but have taken a great burden from off us too. And for us in the other world it is much easier. You have made an end of your own sins; now you are expiating our sins." And having said this, my parents bowed down to me again, and I could not see them; there was nothing but the walls to be seen. I was in great doubt afterwards what had happened with me. I even told the priest of it in confession. Only he thinks it was not a

vision, because visions come only to the clerical gentry.'

'And I'll tell you another dream,' Lukerya went on. 'I dreamt I was sitting on the high-road, under a willow; I had a stick, had a wallet on my shoulders, and my head tied up in a kerchief, just like a pilgrim woman! And I had to go somewhere, a long, long way off, on a pilgrimage. And pilgrims kept coming past me; they came along slowly, all going one way; their faces were weary, and all very much like one another. And I dreamt that moving about among them was a woman, a head taller than the rest, and wearing a peculiar dress, not like ours—not Russian. And her face too was peculiar—a worn face and severe. And all the others moved away from her; but she suddenly turns, and comes straight to me. She stood still, and looked at me; and her eyes were yellow, large, and clear as a falcon's. And I ask her, "Who are you?" And she says to me, "I'm your death." Instead of being frightened, it was quite the other way. I was as pleased as could be; I crossed myself! And the woman, my death, says to me: "I'm sorry for you, Lukerya, but I can't take you with me. Farewell!" Good God! how sad I was then! . . . "Take me," said I, "good mother, take me, darling!" And my death turned to me, and began speaking to me. . . . I knew that she was appointing me my hour, but indistinctly, incomprehensibly. "After St. Peter's day," said she. . . . With

that I awoke. . . . Yes, I have such wonderful dreams!'

Lukerya turned her eyes upwards . . . and sank into thought. . . .

'Only the sad thing is, sometimes a whole week will go by without my getting to sleep once. Last year a lady came to see me, and she gave me a little bottle of medicine against sleeplessness; she told me to take ten drops at a time. It did me so much good, and I used to sleep; only the bottle was all finished long ago. Do you know what medicine that was, and how to get it?'

The lady had obviously given Lukerya opium. I promised to get her another bottle like it, and could not refrain from again wondering aloud at her patience.

'Ah, master!' she answered, 'why do you say so? What do you mean by patience? There, Simeon Stylites now had patience certainly, great patience; for thirty years he stood on a pillar! And another saint had himself buried in the earth, right up to his breast, and the ants ate his face. . . . And I'll tell you what I was told by a good scholar: there was once a country, and the Ishmaelites made war on it, and they tortured and killed all the inhabitants; and do what they would, the people could not get rid of them. And there appeared among these people a holy virgin; she took a great sword, put on armour weighing eighty pounds, went out against the Ishmaelites and drove them all beyond the sea. Only when she

had driven them out, she said to them : " Now burn me, for that was my vow, that I would die a death by fire for my people." And the Ishmaelites took her and burnt her, and the people have been free ever since then! That was a noble deed, now! But what am I!'

I wondered to myself whence and in what shape the legend of Joan of Arc had reached her, and after a brief silence, I asked Lukerya how old she was.

'Twenty-eight . . . or nine. . . . It won't be thirty. But why count the years! I've something else to tell you. . . .'

Lukerya suddenly gave a sort of choked cough, and groaned. . . .

'You are talking a great deal,' I observed to her; 'it may be bad for you.'

'It's true,' she whispered, hardly audibly; 'it's time to end our talk; but what does it matter! Now, when you leave me, I can be silent as long as I like. Any way, I've opened my heart. . . .'

I began bidding her good-bye. I repeated my promise to send her the medicine, and asked her once more to think well and tell me—if there wasn't anything she wanted?'

'I want nothing; I am content with all, thank God!' she articulated with very great effort, but with emotion; 'God give good health to all! But there, master, you might speak a word to your mamma — the peasants here are poor — if she could take the least bit off their rent! They've

not land enough, and no advantages. . . They would pray to God for you. . . . But I want nothing; I 'm quite contented with all.'

I gave Lukerya my word that I would carry out her request, and had already walked to the door. . . . She called me back again.

'Do you remember, master,' she said, and there was a gleam of something wonderful in her eyes and on her lips, 'what hair I used to have? Do you remember, right down to my knees! It was long before I could make up my mind to it. . . . Such hair as it was! But how could it be kept combed? In my state! . . . So I had it cut off. . . . Yes. . . . Well, good-bye, master! I can't talk any more.' . . .

That day, before setting off to shoot, I had a conversation with the village constable about Lukerya. I learnt from him that in the village they called Lukerya the 'Living Relic'; that she gave them no trouble, however; they never heard complaint or repining from her. 'She asks nothing, but, on the contrary, she 's grateful for everything; a gentle soul, one must say, if any there be. Stricken of God,' so the constable concluded, 'for her sins, one must suppose; but we do not go into that. And as for judging her, no—no, we do not judge her. Let her be!'

. . . .

A few weeks later I heard that Lukerya was dead. So her death had come for her . . . and 'after St. Peter's day.' They told me that on the

day of her death she kept hearing the sound of bells, though it was reckoned over five miles from Aleksyevka to the church, and it was a week-day. Lukerya, however, had said that the sounds came not from the church, but from above! Probably she did not dare to say—from heaven.

XXIV

THE RATTLING OF WHEELS

'I 've something to tell you,' observed Yermolaï, coming into the hut to see me. I had just had dinner, and was lying down on a travelling bed to rest a little after a fairly successful but fatiguing day of grouse-shooting—it was somewhere about the 10th of July, and the heat was terrific. . . .

'I 've something to tell you: all our shot 's gone.'

I jumped off the bed.

'All gone? How 's that? Why, we took pretty nearly thirty pounds with us from the village—a whole bag!'

'That 's so; and a big bag it was: enough for a fortnight. But there 's no knowing! There must have been a hole come in it, or something; anyway, there 's no shot . . . that 's to say, there 's enough for ten charges left.'

'What are we to do now? The very best places are before us—we 're promised six coveys for to-morrow. . . .'

'Well, send me to Tula. It's not so far from here; only forty miles. I 'll fly like the wind,

and bring forty pounds of shot if you say the word.'

'But when would you go?'

'Why, directly. Why put it off? Only, I say, we shall have to hire horses.'

'Why hire horses? Why not our own?'

'We can't drive there with our own. The shaft horse has gone lame . . . terribly!'

'Since when 's that?'

'Well, the other day, the coachman took him to be shod. So he was shod, and the blacksmith, I suppose, was clumsy. Now, he can't even step on the hoof. It 's a front leg. He lifts it up . . . like a dog.'

'Well? they 've taken the shoe off, I suppose, at least?'

'No, they 've not; but, of course, they ought to take it off. A nail 's been driven right into the flesh, I should say.'

I ordered the coachman to be summoned. It turned out that Yermolaï had spoken the truth: the shaft-horse really could not put its hoof to the ground. I promptly gave orders for it to have the shoe taken off, and to be stood on damp clay.

'Then do you wish me to hire horses to go to Tula?' Yermolaï persisted.

'Do you suppose we can get horses in this wilderness?' I exclaimed with involuntary irritation.

The village in which we found ourselves was a desolate, God-forsaken place; all its inhabitants

seemed to be poverty-stricken; we had difficulty in discovering one hut, moderately roomy, and even that one had no chimney.

'Yes,' replied Yermolaï with his habitual equanimity; 'what you said about this village is true enough; but there used to be living in this very place one peasant—a very clever fellow! rich too! He had nine horses. He's dead, and his eldest son manages it all now. The man's a perfect fool, but still he's not had time to waste his father's wealth yet. We can get horses from him. If you say the word, I will fetch him. His brothers, I've heard say, are smart chaps . . . but still, he's their head.'

'Why so?'

'Because—he's the eldest! Of course, the younger ones must obey!' Here Yermolaï, in reference to younger brothers as a class, expressed himself with a vigour quite unsuitable for print.

'I'll fetch him. He's a simple fellow. With him you can't fail to come to terms.'

While Yermolaï went after his 'simple fellow' the idea occurred to me that it might be better for me to drive into Tula myself. In the first place, taught by experience, I had no very great confidence in Yermolaï: I had once sent him to the town for purchases; he had promised to get through all my commissions in one day, and was gone a whole week, drank up all the money, and came back on foot, though he had set off in my racing droshky. And, secondly, I had an acquaintance in Tula, a

horsedealer; I might buy a horse off him to take the place of the disabled shaft-horse.

'The thing's decided!' I thought; 'I'll drive over myself; I can sleep just as well on the road—luckily, the coach is comfortable.'

'I've brought him!' cried Yermolaï, rushing into the hut a quarter of an hour later. He was followed by a tall peasant in a white shirt, blue breeches, and bast shoes, with white eyebrows and short-sighted eyes, a wedge-shaped red beard, a long swollen nose, and a gaping mouth. He certainly did look 'simple.

'Here, your honour,' observed Yermolaï, 'he has horses—and he's willing.'

'So be, surely, I' . . . the peasant began hesitatingly in a rather hoarse voice, shaking his thin wisps of hair, and drumming with his fingers on the band of the cap he held in his hands. . . . 'Surely, I . . .'

'What's your name?' I inquired.

The peasant looked down and seemed to think deeply. 'My name?'

'Yes; what are you called?'

'Why my name'ull be—Filofey.'

'Well, then, friend Filofey; I hear you have horses. Bring a team of three here—we'll put them in my coach—it's a light one—and you drive me in to Tula. There's a moon now at night; it's light, and it's cool for driving. What sort of a road have you here?'

'The road? There's naught amiss with the

road. To the main road it will be sixteen miles —not more. . . . There's one little place . . . a bit awkward; but naught amiss else.'

'What sort of little place is it that's awkward?'

'Well, we'll have to cross the river by the ford.'

'But are you thinking of going to Tula yourself?' inquired Yermolaï.

'Yes.'

'Oh!' commented my faithful servant with a shake of his head. 'Oh-oh!' he repeated; then he spat on the floor and walked out of the room.

The expedition to Tula obviously no longer presented any features of interest to him; it had become for him a dull and unattractive business.

'Do you know the road well?' I said, addressing Filofey.

'Surely, we know the road! Only, so to say, please your honour, can't . . so on the sudden, so to say . . .'

It appeared that Yermolaï, on engaging Filofey, had stated that he could be sure that, fool as he was, he'd be paid . . . and nothing more! Filofey, fool as he was—in Yermolaï's words—was not satisfied with this statement alone. He demanded of me fifty roubles—an exorbitant price; I offered him ten—a low price. We fell to haggling; Filofey at first was stubborn; then he began to come down, but slowly. Yermolaï entering for an instant began assuring me, 'that fool—('He's fond of the word, seemingly!' Filofey remarked in a low voice)—'that fool can't reckon money at all,' and

reminded me how twenty years ago a posting tavern established by my mother at the crossing of two high-roads came to complete grief from the fact that the old house-serf who was put there to manage it positively did not understand reckoning money, but valued sums simply by the number of coins—in fact, gave silver coins in change for copper, though he would swear furiously all the time.

'Ugh, you Filofey! you're a regular Filofey!' Yermolaï jeered at last—and he went out, slamming the door angrily.

Filofey made him no reply, as though admitting that to be called Filofey was—as a fact—not very clever of him, and that a man might fairly be reproached for such a name, though really it was the village priest was to blame in the matter for not having done better by him at his christening.

At last we agreed, however, on the sum of twenty roubles. He went off for the horses, and an hour later brought five for me to choose from. The horses turned out to be fairly good, though their manes and tails were tangled, and their bellies round and taut as drums. With Filofey came two of his brothers, not in the least like him. Little, black-eyed, sharp-nosed fellows, they certainly produced the impression of 'smart chaps'; they talked a great deal, very fast—'clacked away,' as Yermolaï expressed it—but obeyed the elder brother.

They dragged the coach out of the shed and

were busy about it and the horses for an hour and a half; first they let out the traces, which were of cord, then pulled them too tight again! Both brothers were very much set on harnessing the 'roan' in the shafts, because 'him can do best going down-hill'; but Filofey decided for 'the shaggy one.' So the shaggy one was put in the shafts accordingly.

They heaped the coach up with hay, put the collar off the lame shaft-horse under the seat, in case we might want to fit it on to the horse to be bought at Tula. . . . Filofey, who had managed to run home and come back in a long, white, loose, ancestral overcoat, a high sugar-loaf cap, and tarred boots, clambered triumphantly up on to the box. I took my seat, looking at my watch: it was a quarter past ten. Yermolaï did not even say good-bye to me—he was engaged in beating his Valetka—Filofey tugged at the reins, and shouted in a thin, thin voice: 'Hey! you little ones!'

His brothers skipped away on both sides, lashed the trace-horses under the belly, and the coach started, turned out of the gates into the street, the shaggy one tried to turn off towards his own home, but Filofey brought him to reason with a few strokes of the whip, and behold! we were already out of the village, and rolling along a fairly even road, between close-growing bushes of thick hazels.

It was a still, glorious night, the very nicest for driving. A breeze rustled now and then in the

bushes, set the twigs swinging and died away again ; in the sky could be seen motionless, silvery clouds ; the moon stood high and threw a bright light on all around. I stretched myself on the hay, and was just beginning to doze . . . but I remembered the 'awkward place,' and started up.

'I say, Filofey, is it far to the ford?'

'To the ford? It 'll be near upon seven miles.'

'Seven miles!' I mused. 'We shan't get there for another hour. I can have a nap meanwhile. Filofey, do you know the road well?' I asked again.

'Surely ; how could I fail to know it? It 's not the first time I 've driven.'

He said something more, but I had ceased to listen. . . . I was asleep.

. . . . . .

I was awakened not, as often happens, by my own intention of waking in exactly an hour, but by a sort of strange, though faint, lapping, gurgling sound at my very ear. I raised my head. . . .

Wonderful to relate! I was lying in the coach as before, but all round the coach, half a foot, not more, from its edge, a sheet of water lay shining in the moonlight, broken up into tiny, distinct, quivering eddies. I looked in front. On the box, with back bowed and head bent, Filofey was sitting like a statue, and a little further on, above the rippling water, I saw the curved arch of the yoke, and the horses' heads and backs. And everything as motionless, as noiseless, as though in some enchanted realm, in a dream—a dream of

fairyland . . . 'What does it mean?' I looked back from under the hood of the coach. . . . 'Why, we are in the middle of the river!' . . . the bank was thirty paces from us.

'Filofey!' I cried.

'What?' he answered.

'What, indeed! Upon my word! Where are we?'

'In the river.'

'I see we're in the river. But, like this, we shall be drowned directly. Is this how you cross the ford? Eh? Why, you're asleep, Filofey! Answer, do!'

'I've made a little mistake,' observed my guide; 'I've gone to one side, a bit wrong, but now we've got to wait a bit.'

'Got to wait a bit? What ever are we going to wait for?'

'Well, we must let the shaggy one look about him; which way he turns his head, that way we've got to go.'

I raised myself on the hay. The shaft-horse's head stood quite motionless. Above the head one could only see in the bright moonlight one ear slightly twitching backwards and forwards.

'Why, he's asleep too, your shaggy one!'

'No,' responded Filofey,' 'he's sniffing the water now.'

And everything was still again; there was only the faint gurgle of the water as before. I sank into a state of torpor.

Moonlight, and night, and the river, and we in it. . . .

'What is that croaking noise?' I asked Filofey.

'That? Ducks in the reeds . . . or else snakes.'

All of a sudden the head of the shaft-horse shook, his ears pricked up; he gave a snort, began to move. 'Ho-ho, ho-ho-o!' Filofey began suddenly bawling at the top of his voice; he sat up and brandished the whip. The coach was at once tugged away from where it had stuck, it plunged forward, cleaving the waters of the river, and moved along, swaying and lurching from side to side. . . . At first it seemed to me we were sinking, getting deeper; however, after two or three tugs and jolts, the expanse of water seemed suddenly lower. . . . It got lower and lower, the coach seemed to grow up out of it, and now the wheels and the horses' tails could be seen, and now stirring with a mighty splashing of big drops, scattering showers of diamonds—no, not diamonds—sapphires in the dull brilliance of the moon, the horses with a spirited pull all together drew us on to the sandy bank and trotted along the road to the hill-side, their shining white legs flashing in rivalry.

'What will Filofey say now?' was the thought that glanced through my mind; 'you see I was right!' or something of that sort. But he said nothing. So I too did not think it necessary to reproach him for carelessness, and lying down in the hay, I tried again to go to sleep.

. . . . . .

But I could not go to sleep, not because I was not tired from hunting, and not because the exciting experience I had just been through had dispelled my sleepiness: it was that we were driving through such very beautiful country. There were liberal, wide-stretching, grassy riverside meadows, with a multitude of small pools, little lakes, rivulets, creeks overgrown at the ends with branches and osiers—a regular Russian scene, such as Russians love, like the scenes amid which the heroes of our old legends rode out to shoot white swans and grey ducks. The road we were driven along wound in a yellowish ribbon, the horses ran lightly—and I could not close my eyes. I was admiring! And it all floated by, softened into harmony under the kindly light of the moon. Filofey—he too was touched by it.

'Those meadows are called St. Yegor's,' he said, turning to me. 'And beyond them come the Grand Duke's; there are no other meadows like them in all Russia. . . . Ah, it's lovely!' The shaft-horse snorted and shook itself. . . . 'God bless you,' commented Filofey gravely in an undertone. 'How lovely!' he repeated with a sigh; then he gave a long sort of grunt. 'There, mowing time's just upon us, and think what hay they'll rake up there!—regular mountains!—And there are lots of fish in the creeks. Such bream!' he added in a sing-song voice. 'In one word, life's sweet—one doesn't want to die.'

He suddenly raised his hand.

'Hullo! look-ee! over the lake . . . is it a crane standing there? Can it be fishing at night? Bless me! it's a branch, not a crane. Well, that was a mistake! But the moon is always so deceptive.'

So we drove on and on. . . . But now the end of the meadows had been reached, little copses and ploughed fields came into view; a little village flashed with two or three lights on one side—it was only four miles now to the main road. I fell asleep.

Again I did not wake up of my own accord. This time I was roused by the voice of Filofey.

'Master! . . . hey, master!'

I sat up. The coach was standing still on level ground in the very middle of the high-road. Filofey, who had turned round on the box, so as to face me, with wide-open eyes (I was positively surprised at them; I couldn't have imagined he had such large eyes), was whispering with mysterious significance:

'A rattle! . . . a rattle of wheels!'

'What do you say?'

'I say, there's a rattling! Bend down and listen. Do you hear it?'

I put my head out of the coach, held my breath, and did catch, somewhere in the distance, far behind us, a faint broken sound, as of wheels rolling.

'Do you hear it?' repeated Filofey.

'Well, yes,' I answered. 'Some vehicle is coming.'

'Oh, you don't hear . . . shoo! The tambourines . . . and whistling too. . . . Do you hear? Take off your cap . . . you will hear better.'

I didn't take off my cap, but I listened.

'Well, yes . . . perhaps. But what of it?'

Filofey turned round facing the horses.

'It's a cart coming . . . lightly; iron-rimmed wheels,' he observed, and he took up the reins. 'It's wicked folks coming, master; hereabouts, you know, near Tula, they play a good many tricks.'

'What nonsense! What makes you suppose it's sure to be wicked people?'

'I speak the truth . . . with tambourines . . . and in an empty cart. . . . Who should it be?'

'Well . . . is it much further to Tula?'

'There's twelve miles further to go, and not a habitation here.'

'Well, then, get on quicker; it's no good lingering.'

Filofey brandished the whip, and the coach rolled on again.

. . . . . .

Though I did not put much faith in Filofey, I could not go to sleep. 'What if it really is so?' A disagreeable sensation began to stir in me. I sat up in the coach—till then I had lain down—and began looking in all directions. While I had been asleep, a slight fog had come over, not the earth, but the sky; it stood high, the moon hung a whitish patch in it, as though in smoke. Every-

thing had grown dim and blended together, though it was clearer near the ground. Around us flat, dreary country; fields, nothing but fields—here and there bushes and ravines—and again fields, mostly fallow, with scanty, dusty grass. A wilderness . . . deathlike! If only a quail had called!

We drove on for half an hour. Filofey kept constantly cracking his whip and clicking with his lips, but neither he nor I uttered a word. So we mounted the hillside. . . . Filofey pulled up the horses, and promptly said again:

'It is a rattle of wheels, master; yes, it is!'

I poked my head out of the coach again, but I might have stayed under the cover of the hood, so distinctly, though still from a distance, the sound reached me of cart-wheels, men whistling, the jingling of tambourines, and even the thud of horses' hoofs; I even fancied I could hear singing and laughter. The wind, it is true, was blowing from there, but there was no doubt that the unknown travellers were a good mile, perhaps two, nearer us. Filofey and I looked at one another; he only gave his hat a tweak forward from behind, and at once, bending over the reins, fell to whipping up the horses. They set off at a gallop, but they could not gallop for long, and fell back into a trot again. Filofey continued to whip them. We must get away!

I can't account for the fact that, though I had not at first shared Filofey's apprehensions, about this time I suddenly gained the conviction that we

really were being followed by highwaymen. . . . I had heard nothing new: the same tambourines, the same rattle of a cart without a load, the same intermittent whistling, the same confused uproar. . . . But now I had no doubt. Filofey could not have made a mistake!

And now twenty minutes more had gone by. . . . During the last of these twenty minutes, even through the clatter and rumble of our own carriage, we could hear another clatter and another rumbling. . . .

'Stop, Filofey,' I said; 'it's no use—the end's the same!'

Filofey uttered a faint-hearted 'wo'! The horses instantaneously stopped, as though delighted at the chance of resting!

Mercy upon us! the tambourines were simply booming away just behind our backs, the cart was rattling and creaking, the men were whistling, shouting, and singing, the horses were snorting and thumping on the ground with their hoofs. . . .

They had overtaken us!

'Bad luck,' Filofey commented, in an emphatic undertone; and, clicking to the horses irresolutely, he began to urge them on again. But at that very instant there was a sort of sudden rush and whizz, and a very big, wide cart, harnessed with three lean horses, cut sharply at a rush up to us, galloped in front, and at once fell into a walking pace, blocking up the road.

'A regular brigand's trick!' murmured Filofey.

I must own I felt a cold chill at my heart. . . . I fell to staring before me with strained attention in the half-darkness of the misty moonlight. In the cart in front of us were—half-lying, half-sitting—six men in shirts, and in unbuttoned rough overcoats; two of them had no caps on; huge feet in boots were swinging and hanging over the cart-rail, arms were rising and falling helter-skelter . . . bodies were jolting backwards and forwards. . . . It was quite clear—a drunken party. Some were bawling at random; one was whistling very correctly and shrilly, another was swearing; on the driver's seat sat a sort of giant in a cape, driving. They went at a walking pace, as though paying no attention to us.

What was to be done? We followed them also at a walking pace . . . we could do nothing else.

For a quarter of a mile we moved along in this manner. The suspense was torturing. . . . To protect, to defend ourselves, was out of the question! There were six of them; and I hadn't even a stick! Should we turn back? But they would catch us up directly. I remembered the line of Zhukovsky (in the passage where he speaks of the murder of field-marshal Kamensky):

'The scoundrel highwayman's vile axe! . . .'

Or else—strangling with filthy cord . . . flung into a ditch . . . there to choke and struggle like a hare in a trap. . . .

Ugh, it was horrid!

And they, as before, went on at a walking pace, taking no notice of us.

'Filofey!' I whispered, 'just try, keep more to the right; see if you can get by.'

Filofey tried—kept to the right . . . but they promptly kept to the right too . . . It was impossible to get by.

Filofey made another effort; he kept to the left. . . . But there, again, they did not let him pass the cart. They even laughed aloud. That meant that they wouldn't let us pass.

'Then they are a bad lot,' Filofey whispered to me over his shoulder.

'But what are they waiting for?' I inquired, also in a whisper.

'To reach the bridge—over there in front—in the hollow—above the stream. . . . They'll do for us there! That's always their way . . . by bridges. It's a clear case for us, master.' He added with a sigh: 'They'll hardly let us go alive; for the great thing for them is to keep it all dark. I'm sorry for one thing, master; my horses are lost, and my brothers won't get them!'

I should have been surprised at the time that Filofey could still trouble about his horses at such a moment; but, I must confess, I had no thoughts for him. . . . 'Will they really kill me?' I kept repeating mentally. 'Why should they? I'll give them everything I have. . . .'

And the bridge was getting nearer and nearer; it could be more and more clearly seen.

Suddenly a sharp whoop was heard; the cart before us, as it were, flew ahead, dashed along, and reaching the bridge, at once stopped stock-still a little on one side of the road. My heart fairly sank like lead.

'Ah, brother Filofey,' I said, 'we are going to our death. Forgive me for bringing you to ruin.'

'As though it were your fault, master! There's no escaping one's fate! Come, Shaggy, my trusty little horse,' Filofey addressed the shaft-horse; 'step on, brother! Do your last bit of service! It's all the same . . .'

And he urged his horses into a trot. We began to get near the bridge—near that motionless, menacing cart. . . . In it everything was silent, as though on purpose. Not a single halloo! It was the stillness of the pike or the hawk, of every beast of prey, as its victim approaches. And now we were level with the cart. . . . Suddenly the giant in the cape sprang out of the cart, and came straight towards us!

He said nothing to Filofey, but the latter, of his own accord, tugged at the reins. . . . The coach stopped.

The giant laid both arms on the carriage door, and bending forward his shaggy head with a grin, he uttered the following speech in a soft, even voice, with the accent of a factory hand:

'Honoured sir, we are coming from an honest feast—from a wedding; we've been marrying one of our fine fellows—that is, we've put him to bed;

we're all young lads, reckless chaps—there's been a good deal of drinking, and nothing to sober us; so wouldn't your honour be so good as to favour us, the least little, just for a dram of brandy for our mate? We'd drink to your health, and remember your worship; but if you won't be gracious to us—well, we beg you not to be angry!'

'What's the meaning of this?' I thought. . . . 'A joke? . . . a jeer?'

The giant continued to stand with bent head. At that very instant the moon emerged from the fog and lighted up his face. There was a grin on the face, in the eyes, and on the lips. But there was nothing threatening to be seen in it . . only it seemed, as it were, all on the alert . . . and the teeth were so white and large. . . .

'I shall be pleased . . . take this . . .' I said hurriedly, and pulling my purse out of my pocket, I took out two silver roubles—at that time silver was still circulating in Russia—'here, if that's enough?'

'Much obliged!' bawled the giant, in military fashion; and his fat fingers in a flash snatched from me—not the whole purse—but only the two roubles: 'much obliged!' He shook his hair back, and ran up to the cart.

'Lads!' he shouted, 'the gentleman makes us a present of two silver roubles!' They all began, as it were, gabbling at once. . . . The giant rolled up on to the driver's seat. . . .

'Good luck to you, master!'

And that was the last we saw of them. The horses dashed on, the cart rumbled up the hill; once more it stood out on the dark line separating the earth from the sky, went down, and vanished.

And now the rattle of the wheels, the shouts and tambourines, could not be heard. . . .

There was a death-like silence.

. . . . . .

Filofey and I could not recover ourselves all at once.

'Ah, you're a merry fellow!' he commented at last, and taking off his hat he began crossing himself. 'Fond of a joke, on my word,' he added, and he turned to me, beaming all over. 'But he must be a capital fellow—on my word! Now, now, now, little ones, look alive! You're safe! We are all safe! It was he who wouldn't let us get by; it was he who drove the horses. What a chap for a joke! Now, now! get on, in God's name!'

I did not speak, but I felt happy too. 'We are safe!' I repeated to myself, and lay down on the hay. 'We've got off cheap!'

I even felt rather ashamed that I had remembered that line of Zhukovsky's.

Suddenly an idea occurred to me.

'Filofey!'

'What is it?'

'Are you married?'

'Yes.'

'And have you children?'

'Yes.'

'How was it you didn't think of them? You were sorry for your horses: weren't you sorry for your wife and children?'

'Why be sorry for them? They weren't going to fall into the hands of thieves, you know. But I kept them in my mind all the while, and I do now . . . surely.' Filofey paused. . . . 'May be . . . it was for their sake Almighty God had mercy on us.'

'But if they weren't highwaymen?'

'How can we tell? Can one creep into the soul of another? Another's soul, we know, is a dark place. But, with the thought of God in the heart, things are always better. . . . No, no! . . . I'd my family all the time. . . . Gee . . . gee-up! little ones, in God's name!'

It was already almost daylight; we began to drive into Tula. I was lying, dreamy and half-asleep.

'Master,' Filofey said to me suddenly, 'look. there they're stopping at the tavern . . . their cart.'

I raised my head . . . there they were, and their cart and horses. In the doorway of the drinking-house there suddenly appeared our friend, the giant in the cape. 'Sir!' he shouted, waving his cap, 'we're drinking your health! — Hey, coachman,' he added, wagging his head at Filofey; 'you were a bit scared, I shouldn't wonder, hey?'

'A merry fellow!' observed Filofey when we had driven nearly fifty yards from the tavern.

We got into Tula at last: I bought shot, and while I was about it, tea and spirits, and even got a horse from the horse-dealer.

At mid-day we set off home again. As we drove by the place where we first heard the rattle of the cart behind us, Filofey, who, having had something to drink at Tula, turned out to be very talkative—he even began telling me fairy-tales—as he passed the place, suddenly burst out laughing.

'Do you remember, master, how I kept saying to you, "A rattle . . . a rattle of wheels," I said!'

He waved his hand several times. This expression struck him as most amusing. The same evening we got back to his village.

I related the adventure that had befallen us to Yermolaï. Being sober, he expressed no sympathy; he only gave a grunt—whether of approval or reproach, I imagine he did not know himself. But two days later he informed me, with great satisfaction, that the very night Filofey and I had been driving to Tula, and on the very road, a merchant had been robbed and murdered. I did not at first put much faith in this, but later on I was obliged to believe it: it was confirmed by the police captain, who came galloping over in consequence.

Was not that perhaps the 'wedding' our brave spirits were returning from?—wasn't that the 'fine fellow' they had 'put to bed,' in the words of the

jocose giant? I stayed five days longer in Filofey's village. Whenever I meet him I always say to him: 'A rattle of wheels? Eh?'

'A merry fellow!' he always answers, and bursts out laughing.

EPILOGUE

THE FOREST AND THE STEPPE

'And slowly something began to draw him,
Back to the country, to the garden dark,
Where lime-trees are so huge, so full of shade,
And lilies of the valley, sweet as maids,
Where rounded willows o'er the water's edge
Lean from the dyke in rows, and where the oak
Sturdily grows above the sturdy field,
Amid the smell of hemp and nettles rank . . .
There, there, in meadows stretching wide,
Where rich and black as velvet is the earth,
Where the sweet rye, far as the eye can see,
Moves noiselessly in tender, billowing waves,
And where the heavy golden light is shed
From out of rounded, white, transparent clouds:
There it is good. . . .'

(*From a poem devoted to the flames.*)

THE reader is, very likely, already weary of my sketches; I hasten to reassure him by promising to confine myself to the fragments already printed; but I cannot refrain from saying a few words at parting about a sportman's life.

Hunting with a dog and a gun is delightful in itself, *für sich*, as they used to say in old days; but

let us suppose you were not born a sportsman, but are fond of nature all the same ; you cannot then help envying us sportsmen. . . . Listen.

Do you know, for instance, the delight of setting off before daybreak in spring ? You come out on to the steps. . . . In the dark grey sky stars are twinkling here and there ; a damp breeze in faint gusts flies to meet you now and then ; there is heard the secret, vague whispering of the night ; the trees faintly rustle, wrapt in darkness. And now they pull the hood over the cart, and lay a box with the samovar at your feet. The trace-horses move restlessly, snort, and daintily paw the ground ; a couple of white geese, only just awake, waddle slowly and silently across the road. On the other side of the hedge, in the garden, the watchman is snoring peacefully ; every sound seems to stand still in the frozen air—suspended, not moving. You take your seat ; the horses start at once ; the cart rolls off with a loud rumble. . . . You drive—drive past the church, downhill to the right, across the dyke. . . . The pond is just beginning to be covered with mist. You are rather chilly ; you cover your face with the collar of your fur cloak ; you doze. The horse's hoofs splash sonorously through the puddles ; the coachman begins to whistle. But by now you have driven over three miles . . . the rim of the sky flushes crimson ; the jackdaws are heard, fluttering clumsily in the birch-trees ; sparrows are twittering about the dark hayricks. The air is clearer, the

road more distinct, the sky brightens, the clouds look whiter, and the fields look greener. In the huts there is the red light of flaming chips; from behind gates comes the sound of sleepy voices. And meanwhile the glow of dawn is beginning; already streaks of gold are stretching across the sky; mists are gathering in clouds over the ravines; the larks are singing musically; the breeze that ushers in the dawn is blowing; and slowly the purple sun floats upward. There is a perfect flood of light; your heart is fluttering like a bird. Everything is fresh, gay, delightful! One can see a long way all round. That way, beyond the copse, a village; there, further, another, with a white church, and there a birch-wood on the hill; behind it the marsh, for which you are bound. . . . Quicker, horses, quicker! Forward at a good trot! . . . There are three miles to go—not more. The sun mounts swiftly higher; the sky is clear. . . . It will be a glorious day. A herd of cattle comes straggling from the village to meet us. You go up the hill. . . . What a view! The river winds for ten miles, dimly blue through the mist; beyond it meadows of watery green; beyond the meadows sloping hills; in the distance the plovers are wheeling with loud cries above the marsh; through the moist brilliance suffused in the air the distance stands out clearly . . . not as in the summer. How freely one drinks in the air, how quickly the limbs move, how strong is the whole man, clasped in the fresh breath of spring! . . .

And a summer morning—a morning in July Who but the sportsman knows how soothing it is to wander at daybreak among the underwoods? The print of your feet lies in a green line on the grass, white with dew. You part the drenched bushes; you are met by a rush of the warm fragrance stored up in the night; the air is saturated with the fresh bitterness of wormwood, the honey sweetness of buckwheat and clover; in the distance an oak wood stands like a wall, and glows and glistens in the sun; it is still fresh, but already the approach of heat is felt. The head is faint and dizzy from the excess of sweet scents. The copse stretches on endlessly . . . Only in places there are yellow glimpses in the distance of ripening rye, and narrow streaks of red buckwheat. Then there is the creak of cart-wheels; a peasant makes his way among the bushes at a walking-pace, and sets his horse in the shade before the heat of the day. . . . You greet him, and turn away; the musical swish of the scythe is heard behind you. The sun rises higher and higher. The grass is speedily dry. And now it is quite sultry. One hour passes another. . . . The sky grows dark over the horizon; the still air is baked with piercing heat. . . . 'Where can one get a drink here, brother?' you inquire of the mower. 'Yonder, in the ravine's a well.' Through the thick hazel-bushes, tangled by the clinging grass, you drop down to the bottom of the ravine. Right

under the cliff a little spring is hidden; an oak bush greedily spreads out its twigs like great fingers over the water; great silvery bubbles rise trembling from the bottom, covered with fine velvety moss. You fling yourself on the ground, you drink, but you are too lazy to stir. You are in the shade, you drink in the damp fragrance, you take your ease, while the bushes face you, glowing, and, as it were, turning yellow in the sun. But what is that? There is a sudden flying gust of wind; the air is astir all about you: was not that thunder? Is it the heat thickening? Is a storm coming on? . . . And now there is a faint flash of lightning. . . . Ah, this is a storm! The sun is still blazing; you can still go on hunting. But the storm-cloud grows; its front edge, drawn out like a long sleeve, bends over into an arch. The grass, the bushes, everything around grows dark. . . . Make haste! over there you think you catch sight of a hay barn . . . make haste! . . . You run there, go in. . . . What rain! What flashes of lightning! The water drips in through some hole in the thatch-roof on to the sweet-smelling hay. . . . But now the sun is shining bright again. The storm is over; you come out. My God, the joyous sparkle of everything! the fresh, limpid air, the scent of raspberries and mushrooms! And then the evening comes on. There is the blaze of fire glowing and covering half the sky. The sun sets: the air near has a peculiar transparency as of crystal; over the

distance lies a soft, warm-looking haze; with the dew a crimson light is shed on the fields, lately plunged in floods of limpid gold; from trees and bushes and high stacks of hay run long shadows. . . . The sun has set: a star gleams and quivers in the fiery sea of the sunset . . . and now it pales; the sky grows blue; the separate shadows vanish; the air is plunged in darkness. It is time to turn homewards to the village, to the hut, where you will stay the night. Shouldering your gun, you move briskly, in spite of fatigue. . . . Meanwhile, the night comes on: now you cannot see twenty paces from you; the dogs show faintly white in the dark. Over there, above the black bushes, there is a vague brightness on the horizon. . . . What is it?—a fire? . . . No, it is the moon rising. And away below, to the right, the village lights are twinkling already. . . . And here at last is your hut. Through the tiny window you see a table, with a white cloth, a candle burning, supper. . . .

Another time you order the racing droshky to be got out, and set off to the forest to shoot woodcock. It is pleasant making your way along the narrow path between two high walls of rye. The ears softly strike you in the face; the cornflowers cling round your legs; the quails call around; the horse moves along at a lazy trot. And here is the forest, all shade and silence. Graceful aspens rustle high above you; the long-hanging branches of the birches scarcely stir; a mighty oak stands

like a champion beside a lovely lime-tree. You go along the green path, streaked with shade; great yellow flies stay suspended, motionless, in the sunny air, and suddenly dart away; midges hover in a cloud, bright in the shade, dark in the sun; the birds are singing peacefully; the golden little voice of the warbler sings of innocent, babbling joyousness, in sweet accord with the scent of the lilies of the valley. Further, further, deeper into the forest . . . the forest grows more dense. . . . An unutterable stillness falls upon the soul within; without, too, all is still and dreamy. But now a wind has sprung up, and the tree-tops are booming like falling waves. Here and there, through last year's brown leaves, grow tall grasses; funguses stand apart under their wide-brimmed hats. All at once a hare skips out; the dog scurries after it with a resounding bark. . . .

And how fair is this same forest in late autumn, when the snipe are on the wing! They do not keep in the heart of the forest; one must look for them along the outskirts. There is no wind, and no sun; no light, no shade, no movement, no sound: the autumn perfume, like the perfume of wine, is diffused in the soft air; a delicate haze hangs over the yellow fields in the distance. The still sky is a peacefully untroubled white through the bare brown branches; in parts, on the limes, hang the last golden leaves. The damp earth is elastic under your feet; the high dry blades of grass do not stir; long threads

lie shining on the blanched turf, white with dew. You breathe tranquilly; but there is a strange tremor in the soul. You walk along the forest's edge, look after your dog, and meanwhile loved forms, loved faces dead and living, come to your mind; long, long slumbering impressions unexpectedly awaken; the fancy darts off and soars like a bird; and all moves so clearly and stands out before your eyes. The heart at one time throbs and beats, plunging passionately forward; at another it is drowned beyond recall in memories. Your whole life, as it were, unrolls lightly and rapidly before you: a man at such times possesses all his past, all his feelings and his powers—all his soul; and there is nothing around to hinder him — no sun, no wind, no sound. . . .

And a clear, rather cold autumn day, with a frost in the morning, when the birch, all golden like some tree in a fairy tale, stands out picturesquely against the pale blue sky; when the sun, standing low in the sky, does not warm, but shines more brightly than in summer; the small aspen copse is all a-sparkle through and through, as though it were glad and at ease in its nakedness; the hoar-frost is still white at the bottom of the hollows; while a fresh wind softly stirs up and drives before it the falling, crumpled leaves; when blue ripples whisk gladly along the river, lifting rhythmically the heedless geese and ducks; in the distance the mill creaks, half-hidden by the

willows; and with changing colours in the clear air the pigeons wheel in swift circles above it. . . .

Sweet, too, are dull days in summer, though the sportsmen do not like them. On such days one can't shoot the bird that flutters up from under your very feet, and vanishes at once in the whitish dark of the hanging fog. But how peaceful, how unutterably peaceful it is everywhere! Everything is awake, and everything is hushed. You pass by a tree: it does not stir a leaf; it is musing in repose. Through the thin steamy mist, evenly diffused in the air, there is a long streak of black before you. You take it for a neighbouring copse close at hand; you go up—the copse is transformed into a high row of wormwood in the boundary-ditch. Above you, around you, on all sides—mist. . . . But now a breeze is faintly astir; a patch of pale-blue sky peeps dimly out; through the thinning, as it were, smoky mist, a ray of golden yellow sunshine breaks out suddenly, flows in a long stream, strikes on the fields and in the copse—and now everything is overcast again. For long this struggle is drawn out, but how unutterably brilliant and magnificent the day becomes when at last light triumphs and the last waves of the warmed mist here unroll and are drawn out over the plains, there wind away and vanish into the deep, tenderly shining heights. . . .

Again you set off into outlying country, to the steppe. For some ten miles you make your way over cross-roads, and here at last is the high-road.

Past endless trains of waggons, past wayside taverns, with the hissing samovar under a shed, wide-open gates and a well, from one hamlet to another; across endless fields, alongside green hempfields, a long, long time you drive. The magpies flutter from willow to willow; peasant women with long rakes in their hands wander in the fields; a man in a threadbare nankin overcoat, with a wicker pannier over his shoulder, trudges along with weary step; a heavy country coach, harnessed with six tall, broken-winded horses, rolls to meet you. The corner of a cushion is sticking out of a window, and on a sack up behind, hanging on to a string, perches a groom in a fur-cloak, splashed with mud to his very eyebrows. And here is the little district town with its crooked little wooden houses, its endless fences, its empty stone shops, its old-fashioned bridge over a deep ravine. . . . On, on! . . . The steppe country is reached at last. You look from a hill-top: what a view! Round low hills, tilled and sown to their very tops, are seen in broad undulations; ravines, overgrown with bushes, wind coiling among them; small copses are scattered like oblong islands; from village to village run narrow paths; churches stand out white; between willow-bushes glimmers a little river, in four places dammed up by dykes; far off, in a field, in a line, an old manor-house, with its outhouses, fruit-garden, and threshing-floor, huddles close up to a small lake. But on, on you go. The hills are smaller and ever

smaller; there is scarcely a tree to be seen. Here it is at last—the boundless, untrodden steppe!

And on a winter day to walk over the high snowdrifts after hares; to breathe the keen frosty air, while half-closing the eyes involuntarily at the fine blinding sparkle of the soft snow; to admire the emerald sky above the reddish forest! . . . And the first spring day when everything is shining, and breaking up, when across the heavy streams, from the melting snow, there is already the scent of the thawing earth; when on the bare thawed places, under the slanting sunshine, the larks are singing confidingly, and, with glad splash and roar, the torrents roll from ravine to ravine. . . .

But it is time to end. By the way, I have spoken of spring: in spring it is easy to part; in spring even the happy are drawn away to the distance. . . . Farewell, reader! I wish you unbroken prosperity.

THE END

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